

The Patristic Doctrine of Creation

by Father Seraphim Rose

THE CREATION OF ADAM



EDITOR'S NOTE

The following letter was written by Fr. Seraphim to Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, a Greek Orthodox medical doctor, church writer, and "Christian evolutionist." Fr. Seraphim was responding to a letter from Dr. Kalomiros, in which the latter attempted to show that the Holy Scriptures and the teaching of the Holy Fathers were compatible with modern evolutionary theory. According to Dr. Kalomiros, Adam was an "evolved beast," who at the appropriate point in his evolutionary development received the grace of God and thus became man. Dr. Kalomiros wrote: "When the Lord God breathed into Adam's face the breath of life, then the evolved beast became a logical creature.... I would not be surprised if Adam's body had been in all respects the body of an ape.... Adam was probably biologically less evolved than man of present days.... He was taken from the top step of the evolutionary ladder of anthropoids. Man does not come from monkeys but from another branch of anthropoids with a parallel evolution. We have nothing by which to conclude in which stage of evolution the breath of God was given to the animal."

Fr. Seraphim's reply to Dr. Kalomiros, published posthumously in Epiphany Journal (Fall 1989–Winter 1990) and later in abridged form in The Christian Activist (Spring/Summer 1998), has become the definitive introduction to the Patristic doctrine of creation and the definitive Patristic refutation of the modern theory of evolution. We present it here with section titles added by the editor.

For more about Fr. Seraphim's correspondence with Dr. Kalomiros, see the Editor's Preface (pp. 26–30, 35, 40) and the selections from Fr. Seraphim's letters in Part V (pp. 514–15, 522–44).

Fifth Week of Great Lent, 1974

Dear Dr. Kalomiros,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ.

At last I am writing my reply to your letter on "evolution." This reply expresses the view of our Brotherhood on this question. I will repeat to you that I have written this reply not as an "expert" on the Holy Fathers, but as a "lover" of the Holy Fathers, which I believe you are also. Most of the citations I have made here from the Holy Fathers I have translated from the Russian Patristic translations of the nineteenth century, with some also from the English translations of the nineteenth century which are printed in the "Eerdmans" Nicene Fathers Series. I have given the sources as fully as possible so that you can read them in Greek. If you have questions about these or any other Patristic citations I will be glad to discuss them further with you. I am not at all concerned merely to find citations that "prove my point," and in fact you will notice that I have also included some citations which do *not* seem to "prove my point"—for I am interested first and only in finding *how the Holy Fathers thought on these questions*, for I believe that is the way we should think also. May Christ our God bless me to speak truthfully.

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The question of "evolution" is an extremely important one for Orthodox Christians, for in it are involved many questions which directly affect our Orthodox doctrine and outlook: the relative worth of science and theology, of modern philosophy and Patristic teaching; the doctrine of man (anthropology); our attitude toward the writings of the Holy Fathers (do we really take seriously their writings and try to live by them, or do we believe first of all in modern "wisdom," the wisdom of this world, and accept the teaching of the Holy Fathers only if it harmonizes with this "wisdom"?); our interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, and especially the book of Genesis. In what follows I will touch on all these subjects.

Before one begins to discuss the question of evolution, one must have a clear idea of what he is talking about. I say this because I have had very surprising experiences with very learned people who speak as if they knew all about this subject and yet they make very elementary mistakes which reveal that there is much that they do not know about it. In particular, almost everyone who writes about evolution *assumes* that he knows what "evolution" is—and yet what he says reveals that he has a very confused idea of it. The question of evolution is by no means a simple one, and there is so much confusion in people's minds about it—including the minds of most Orthodox Christians—that we cannot even talk about it until we are *quite sure* that we know what we are talking about.

You have asked us to "clear your mind very carefully of all Western conceptions, whether these are theological, philosophical, or scientific." I assure you that I have tried to do this, and throughout this letter I will constantly be on the watch *not* to think in terms of Western conceptions, because I agree with you that these conceptions falsify the subject matter, and by means of them one *cannot* understand the question of evolution. But in turn I ask *you* to try very carefully to cleanse your mind of whatever preconceptions about the questions of evolution you may have—what you have learned in school, what you have read in scientific books, what you may think about "anti-evolutionists," what Greek theologians may have said about the subject. Let us try to reason together, not in the manner of Western rationalists, but as Orthodox Christians who love the Holy Fathers and wish to understand their teaching, and also as rational beings who do not accept the teaching of any modern "wise men," whether they be theologians or philosophers or scientists *unless* that teaching accords with the Scriptural and Patristic teaching and does not come from some foreign philosophy.

1. Philosophy, Not Fact

First of all, I agree entirely with you when you say: "You must not confuse *pure science* with the different philosophical theories written *to*

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explain the facts discovered by science. Facts are one thing (pure science) and explanations of facts is another (philosophy)."

I must tell you first of all that at one time I believed entirely in evolution. I believed not because I had thought very much about this question, but simply because "everyone believes it," because it is a "fact," and how can one deny "facts"? But then I began to think more deeply on this question. I began to see that very often what calls itself "science" is not *fact* at all, but *philosophy*, and I began very carefully to distinguish between *scientific facts* and *scientific philosophy*. After many years I came to the following conclusions:

a. Evolution is *not* "scientific fact" at all, but philosophy.

b. It is a *false* philosophy which was invented in the West as a reaction against Roman Catholic-Protestant theology, and which *disguised* itself as "science" in order to make itself respectable and deceive people who are willing to accept scientific fact. (In the West almost all modern errors do this same thing; even "Christian Science" claims to be "scientific," so also Spiritism, various Hindu cults, etc.)

c. It is contrary to the teaching of the Holy Fathers on very many points.

I have deliberately given you my conclusions before explaining them to you, in order to make you stop and think: are you *sure* that you have put away all your preconceptions about evolution and are prepared to think clearly and dispassionately on this subject? Are you willing to admit that there may be some truth in what I will now have to say on this subject? I must tell you frankly that most "evolutionists" will stop at this point and say: this man is crazy, he is denying facts. I am trusting that your mind is at least open enough to read the rest of what I will say, which I try to base entirely on the Holy Fathers. If I make mistakes, I hope that you will tell me.

2. A Clear Definition

Many of the arguments between "evolutionists" and "anti-evolutionists" are useless, for one basic reason: they are usually not arguing about the same thing. Each one of them means *one thing* when he hears the word "evolution," and the other means *something else*; and

they argue in vain because they are not even talking about the same thing. Therefore, in order to be precise, I will tell you *exactly* what I mean by the word "evolution," which is the meaning it has in all textbooks of evolution. But first I must show you that in your letter you have used the word "evolution" to mean two entirely different things, but you write *as if they were the same thing*. You have failed here to distinguish between *scientific fact* and *philosophy*.

a. You write: "The first chapters of the Holy Bible are nothing else but the history of creation progressing and being completed *in time*. . . . Creation did not come into being instantly, but followed a sequence of appearances, a development in six different 'days.' How can we call this progress of Creation in time if not evolution?"

I answer: all that you say is true, and if you wish you can call this process of creation "evolution"—but *this is not what the controversy over evolution is about*. All scientific textbooks define evolution as a *specific theory concerning HOW* creatures came to be in time: BY MEANS OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF ONE KIND OF CREATURE INTO ANOTHER, "COMPLEX FORMS BEING DERIVED FROM SIMPLER FORMS" IN A NATURAL PROCESS TAKING COUNTLESS MILLIONS OF YEARS (Storer, *General Zoology*). Later on, when you talk about the "evolved beast" Adam, you reveal that you believe in this *specific scientific theory also*. I hope to show you that the Holy Fathers did *not* believe in this specific scientific theory, even though this is certainly not the most important aspect of the doctrine of evolution, which more fundamentally is in error concerning the *nature of man*, as I will show below.

b. You say: "We all came into being by evolution in time. In our mother's uterus each one of us was at first one single-cell organism . . . and finally a perfect man." Of course *everyone* believes this, whether he is an "evolutionist" or an "anti-evolutionist." But this has nothing to do with the *doctrine* of evolution which is being disputed.

c. Again you say: "Adam was of which race, white, negro, red, or yellow? How did we become so different from one another when we are descendants of one single couple? Is this differentiation of man in different races not a product of evolution?"

I answer again: No, this is *not* what the word "evolution" means!

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There are very many books in the English language which discuss the question of evolution from a *scientific* point of view. Perhaps you do not know that *many scientists deny the fact of evolution* (meaning the derivation of all existing creatures by transformation from other creatures), and very many scientists state that *it is impossible to know by science whether evolution is true or not, because there is no evidence whatever that can conclusively prove or disprove it*. If you wish, in another letter I can discuss with you the “scientific evidence” for evolution. I assure you that if you look at this evidence objectively, without any *preconceptions* about what you will find in it, you will discover that there is not one piece of evidence for evolution that cannot equally be explained by a theory of “special creation.”

Please be very clear that I am *not* telling you that I can *disprove* the theory of evolution by science; I am only telling you that *the theory of evolution can neither be proved nor disproved by science*. Those scientists who say that evolution is a “fact” are actually *interpreting* the scientific facts *in accordance with a philosophical theory*; those who say that evolution is *not* a fact are likewise *interpreting* the evidence in accordance with a *different* philosophical theory. *By pure science alone* it is not possible conclusively to prove or disprove the “fact” of evolution.

You should also know that many books have likewise been written about “the difficulties of the evolutionary theory.” If you wish, I will be glad to discuss with you some of these difficulties, which seem to be totally unexplainable if evolution is a “fact.”

3. Development, Not Evolution

I wish to make very clear to you: I do not at all deny the fact of *change and development* in nature. That a full-grown man grows from an embryo; that a great tree grows from a small acorn; that new *varieties* of organisms are developed, whether the “races” of man or different kinds of cats and dogs and fruit trees—but all of this is *not evolution*: it is only variation *within* a definite kind or species; it does not prove or even suggest (unless you already *believe* this for non-scientific reasons) that one kind or species develops into another and

that all present creatures are the product of such a development from one or a few primitive organisms. I believe that this is clearly the teaching of St. Basil the Great in the *Hexaemeron*, as I will now point out.

In Homily 5:7 of the *Hexaemeron*, St. Basil writes:

Let no one, therefore, who is living in vice despair of himself, knowing that, as agriculture changes the properties of plants, so the diligence of the soul in the pursuit of virtue can triumph over all sorts of infirmities.

No one, "evolutionist" or "anti-evolutionist," will deny that the "properties" of creatures can be changed; but this is not a proof of evolution *unless* it can be shown that *one kind or species can be changed into another*, and even more, that *every species changes into another in an uninterrupted chain back to the most primitive organism*. I will show below what St. Basil says on this subject.

Again St. Basil writes:

How then, they say, does the earth bring forth seeds of the particular kind, when, after sowing grain, we frequently gather this black wheat? This is not a change to another kind, but as it were some disease and defect of the seed. It has not ceased to be wheat, but has been made black by burning.¹

This passage would *seem* to indicate that St. Basil does not believe in "a change to another kind"—but I do not accept this as conclusive proof, since I wish to know what St. Basil *really* teaches, and not make my own arbitrary interpretation of his words. All that can really be said of this passage is that St. Basil recognizes some kind of a "change" in the wheat which is *not* a "change to another kind." This kind of change is *not* evolution.

Again St. Basil writes:

Certain men have already observed that, if pines are cut down or burned, they are changed into oak forests.²

This quote really proves nothing, and I use it only because it has been used by others to show that St. Basil believed (1) that one kind of creature actually changes into another (but I will show below what St. Basil *actually* teaches on this subject); and (2) that St. Basil made scientific mistakes, since this statement is untrue. Here I should state an elementary truth: modern science, *when it deals with scientific facts*, does indeed usually know more than the Holy Fathers, and the Holy Fathers can easily make mistakes of scientific facts; *it is not scientific facts which we look for in the Holy Fathers*, but true theology and the true philosophy which is based on theology. Yet in this particular case it happens that St. Basil is *scientifically correct*, because it often in fact happens that in a pine forest there is a strong undergrowth of oak (the forest in which we live, in fact, is a similar kind of mixed pine-oak forest), and when the pine is removed by burning the oak grows rapidly and produces the change from a pine to an oak forest in ten or fifteen years. This is *not evolution*, but a different kind of change, and I will now show that St. Basil *could not* have believed that the pine is actually *transformed* or *evolved* into an oak.

Let us see now what St. Basil believed about the "evolution" or "fixity" of species. He writes:

There is nothing truer than this, that each plant either has seed or there exists in it some generative power. And this accounts for the expression "of its own kind." For the shoot of the reed is not productive of an olive tree, but from the reed comes another reed; and from seeds spring plants related to the seeds sown. Thus, what was put forth by the earth in its first generation has been preserved until the present time, since the kinds persisted through constant reproduction.³

Again, St. Basil writes:

The nature of existing objects, set in motion by one command, passes through creation without change, by generation and destruction, preserving the succession of the kinds through resemblance, until it reaches the very end. It begets a horse as the successor of a

horse, a lion of a lion, and an eagle of an eagle; and it continues to preserve each of the animals by uninterrupted successions until the consummation of the universe. No length of time causes the specific characteristics of the animals to be corrupted or extinct, but, as if established just recently, nature, ever fresh, moves along with time.⁴

It seems quite clear that St. Basil did *not* believe that one kind of creature is transformed into another, much less that *every* creature now existing was evolved from some other creature, and so on back to the most primitive organism. *This is a modern philosophical idea.*

I should tell you that I do *not* regard this question as being of particular importance in itself; I shall discuss below other much more important questions. If it were really a *scientific fact* that one kind of creature can be transformed into another kind, I would have no difficulty believing it, since God can do anything, and the transformations and developments we can see now in nature (an embryo becoming a man, an acorn becoming an oak tree, a caterpillar becoming a butterfly) are so astonishing that one could easily believe that one species *could* "evolve" into another. But there is no conclusive *scientific proof* that such a thing has *ever* happened, much less that this is the law of the universe, and everything now living derives ultimately from some primitive organism. The Holy Fathers quite clearly did not believe in any such theory—*because the theory of evolution was not invented until modern times.* It is a product of the modern Western mentality, and if you wish I can show you later how this theory developed *together with the course of modern philosophy from Descartes onward*, long before there was any "scientific proof" for it. The idea of evolution is entirely absent from the text of Genesis, according to which each creature is generated "according to its kind," *not* "one changing into another." And the Holy Fathers, as I will show below in detail, accepted the text of Genesis quite simply, without reading into it any "scientific theories" or allegories.

Now you will understand why I do not accept your quotations from St. Gregory of Nyssa about the "ascent of nature from the least to the perfect" as a proof of evolution. I believe, as the sacred Scripture of Genesis relates, that there was indeed an orderly creation in

steps; but *nowhere* in Genesis or in the writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa is it stated that one *kind* of creature was transformed into another kind, and that *all* creatures came to be in this manner! I quite disagree with you when you say: "Creation is described in the first chapter of Genesis exactly as modern science describes it." If by "modern science" you mean *evolutionary* science, then I believe you are mistaken, as I have indicated. You have made a mistake by assuming that the kind of development described in Genesis, in St. Gregory of Nyssa and in other Fathers, is the *same* as that described by the doctrine of evolution; but such a thing *cannot* be assumed or taken for granted—you must *prove* it, and I will gladly discuss with you later the "scientific proof" for and against evolution, if you wish. The *development* of creation according to God's plan is one thing; the modern scientific (but actually philosophical) theory which *explains* this development by the transformation of one kind of creature into another, starting from one or a few primitive organisms, *is quite a different thing*. The Holy Fathers did *not* hold this modern theory; if you can show me that they *did* hold such a theory, I will be glad to listen to you.

If, on the other hand, by "modern science" you mean science which does *not* bind itself to the philosophical theory of evolution, I *still* disagree with you; and I will show below why I believe, according to the Holy Fathers, that modern science *cannot attain to any knowledge at all of the Six Days of Creation*. In any case, it is very arbitrary to identify the geological strata with "periods of creation." There are numerous difficulties in the way of this naive correspondence between Genesis and science. Does "modern science" really believe that the grass and trees of the earth existed in a long geological period *before the existence of the sun*, which was created only on the Fourth Day? I believe you are making a serious mistake in binding up your interpretation of Holy Scripture with a *particular scientific theory* (not at all a "fact"). I believe that our interpretation of Holy Scripture should be bound up with *no scientific theory*, neither "evolutionary" nor any other. Let us rather accept the Holy Scriptures *as the Holy Fathers teach us* (about which I will write below), and let us not speculate about the *how* of creation. The doctrine of evolution is a modern speculation

about the *how* of creation, and in many respects it contradicts the teaching of the Holy Fathers, as I shall show below.

Of course I accept your quotations from St. Gregory of Nyssa; I have found others similar to them in other Holy Fathers. I will certainly not deny that our nature is partly an animal nature, nor that we are bound up with the whole of creation, which is indeed a marvelous unity. *But all this has nothing whatever to do with the doctrine of evolution*, that doctrine which is defined in all textbooks as the derivation of all presently existing creatures from one or more primitive creatures through a process of the transformation of one kind of species into another.

Further, you should realize (and now I begin to approach the important teachings of the Holy Fathers on this subject) that St. Gregory of Nyssa himself quite explicitly did *not* believe in anything like the modern doctrine of evolution, for he teaches that *the first man Adam was indeed created directly by God and was not generated like all other men*. In his book "Against Eunomius" he writes:

The first man, and the man born from him, received their being in a different way; the latter by copulation, *the former from the molding of Christ Himself*; and yet, though they are thus believed to be two, they are inseparable in the definition of their being, and are not considered as two beings.... The idea of humanity in Adam and Abel does not vary with the difference of their origin, neither the order nor the manner of their coming into existence making any difference in their nature.⁵

And again:

That which reasons, and is mortal, and is capable of thought and knowledge, is called "man" equally in the case of Adam and of Abel, and this name of the nature is not altered either by the fact that Abel passed into existence by generation, or by the fact that *Adam did so without generation*.⁶

Of course I agree with the teaching of St. Athanasius which you quote, that "the first-created man was made of dust like everyone, and the

hand which created Adam then, is creating now also and always those who come after him." How can anyone deny this obvious truth of God's continuous creative activity? But this general truth does not at all contradict the specific truth that the first man *was made in a way different from all other men*, as other Fathers also clearly teach. Thus, St. Cyril of Jerusalem calls Adam "God's first-*formed* man," but Cain "the first-*born* man."⁷ Again, he teaches clearly, discussing the creation of Adam, that *Adam was not conceived of another body*: "That of bodies bodies should be conceived, even if wonderful, is nevertheless possible; but that *the dust of the earth should become a man*, this is more wonderful."⁸

Yet again, the divine Gregory the Theologian writes:

They who make "Unbegotten" and "Begotten" natures of equivocal Gods would perhaps make Adam and Seth differ in nature, since the former *was not born of flesh (for he was created)*, but the latter was born of Adam and Eve.⁹

And the same Father says even more explicitly:

What of Adam? *Was he not alone the direct creature of God?* Yes, you will say. Was he then the only human being? By no means. And why, but *because humanity does not consist in direct creation?* For that which is begotten is *also* human.¹⁰

And St. John Damascene, whose theology gives concisely the teaching of all the early Fathers, writes:

The earliest formation (of man) is called "creation" and not "generation." For "*creation*" is *the original formation at God's hands*, while "generation" is the succession from each other made necessary by the sentence of death imposed on us on account of the transgression.¹¹

And what of Eve? Do you not believe that, as the Scripture and Holy Fathers teach, she was made from Adam's rib and was not born of some other creature? But St. Cyril writes:

Eve was begotten of Adam, and not conceived of a mother, but as it were *brought forth of man alone*.¹²

And St. John Damascene, comparing the Most Holy Mother of God with Eve, writes:

Just as the latter *was formed from Adam without connection*, so also did the former bring forth the new Adam, who was brought forth in accordance with the laws of parturition and above the nature of generation.¹³

It would be possible to quote other Holy Fathers on this subject, but I will not do so unless you question this point. But with all of this discussion I have not yet come to the most important questions raised by the theory of evolution, and so I shall now turn to some of them.

4. How Do the Holy Fathers Interpret Genesis?

In what I have written about Adam and Eve, you will note that I quoted Holy Fathers who interpret the text of Genesis in a way that might be called rather “literal.” Am I correct in supposing that you would like to interpret the text more “allegorically” when you say that to believe in the immediate creation of Adam by God is “a very narrow conception of the Sacred Scriptures”? This is an extremely important point, and I am truly astonished to find that “Orthodox evolutionists” *do not at all know how the Holy Fathers interpret the book of Genesis*. I am sure you will agree with me that *we are not free to interpret the Holy Scriptures as we please*, but we must interpret them *as the Holy Fathers teach us*. I am afraid that not all who speak about Genesis and evolution pay attention to this principle. Some people are so concerned to combat Protestant fundamentalism that they go to extreme lengths to refute anyone who wishes to interpret the sacred text of Genesis “literally”; but in so doing they never refer to St. Basil or other commentators on the book of Genesis, who state quite clearly the principles we are to follow in interpreting the sacred text. I am afraid that many of us who profess to follow the Patristic tradition are sometimes careless,

and easily fall into accepting our own "wisdom" in place of the teaching of the Holy Fathers. I firmly believe that *the whole world outlook and philosophy of life for an Orthodox Christian may be found in the Holy Fathers*; if we will listen to their teaching instead of thinking we are wise enough to teach others from our own "wisdom," we will not go astray.

And now I ask you to examine with me the very important and fundamental question: how do the Holy Fathers teach us to interpret the book of Genesis? Let us put away our preconceptions about "literal" or "allegorical" interpretations, and let us see what the *Holy Fathers* teach us about reading the text of Genesis.

We cannot do better than to begin with St. Basil himself, who has written so inspiringly of the Six Days of Creation. In the *Hexaemeron* he writes:

Those who do not admit the common meaning of the Scriptures say that water is not water, but some other nature, and they explain a plant and a fish according to their own opinion. They describe also the production of reptiles and wild animals, changing it according to their own notions, just like the dream interpreters, who interpret for their own ends the appearances seen in their dreams. When I hear "grass," I think of grass, and in the same manner I understand every thing as it is said, a plant, a fish, a wild animal, and an ox. "Indeed, I am not ashamed of the Gospel."... Since Moses left unsaid, as useless for us, things in no way pertaining to us, shall we for this reason believe that the words of the Spirit are of less value than the foolish wisdom (of those who have written about the world)? Or shall I rather give glory to Him Who has not kept our mind occupied with vanities but has ordained that all things be written for the edification and guidance of our souls? This is a thing of which they seem to me to have been unaware, who have attempted by false arguments and allegorical interpretations to bestow on the Scripture a dignity of their own imagining. But theirs is the attitude of one *who considers himself wiser than the revelations of the Spirit* and introduces his own ideas in pretense of an explanation. Therefore, *let it be understood as it has been written.*¹⁴

Clearly, St. Basil is warning us to beware of “explaining away” things in Genesis which are difficult for our common sense to understand; *it is very easy for the “enlightened” modern man to do this, even if he is an Orthodox Christian*. Let us therefore try all the harder to understand the sacred Scripture *as the Fathers understand it*, and not according to our modern “wisdom.” And let us not be satisfied with the views of one Holy Father; let us examine the views of other Holy Fathers as well.

One of the standard Patristic commentaries on the book of Genesis is that of St. Ephraim the Syrian. His views are all the more important for us in that he was an “Easterner” and knew the Hebrew language well. Modern scholars tell us that “Easterners” are given to “allegorical” interpretations, and that the book of Genesis likewise must be understood in this way. But let us see what St. Ephraim says in his commentary on Genesis:

No one should think that the Creation of Six Days is an allegory: it is likewise impermissible to say that what seems, according to the account, to have been created in the course of six days, was created in a single instant, and likewise that certain names presented in this account either signify nothing, or signify something else. On the contrary, one must know that just as the heaven and the earth which were created in the beginning are actually the heaven and the earth and not something else understood under the names of heaven and earth, so also *everything else that is spoken of as being created and brought into order after the creation of heaven and earth is not empty names*, but the very essence of the created natures corresponds to the force of these names.¹⁵

These are still, of course, general principles; let us look now at several specific applications by St. Ephraim of these principles.

Although both the light and the clouds were created *in the twinkling of an eye*, still both the day and the night of the First Day continued *for twelve hours each*.¹⁶

Again:



St. Ephraim the Syrian (306–372).
Icon from Meteora, Greece.

When *in the twinkling of an eye* (Adam's) rib was taken out and likewise *in an instant* the flesh took its place, and the bare rib took on the complete form and all the beauty of a woman, then God led her and presented her to Adam.¹⁷

It is quite clear that St. Ephraim reads the book of Genesis “as it is written”; when he hears “the rib of Adam” he understands “the rib of Adam,” and does not understand this as an allegorical way of saying something else altogether. Likewise he quite explicitly understands the Six Days of Creation to be just six days, each with twenty-four hours, which he divides into an “evening” and “morning” of twelve hours each.

I have deliberately taken the "simple" commentary on Genesis of St. Ephraim the Syrian, before quoting other more "mystical" commentaries, because this "simple" understanding of Genesis is the most offensive to the "enlightened" modern mind. I suspect that most Orthodox Christians who are not well read in the Holy Fathers will immediately say: "This is too simple! We know more than that now. Give us more sophisticated Fathers." Alas for our modern "wisdom"—there are no more "sophisticated" Fathers, for *even the most "mystical" Fathers understand the text of Genesis in just the "simple" way St. Ephraim does!* Those who wish more "sophistication" in the Holy Fathers are under the influence of modern Western ideas which are entirely foreign to the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church. But I will have to show this by quoting many Holy Fathers.

Let us examine now specifically the question of the "length" of the Six Days of Creation. I believe that this is still a question of secondary importance among those raised by the theory of evolution, but it certainly will not hurt us to know what the Holy Fathers thought of this, all the more so because here we will begin to glimpse the great difference which exists between the modern Western idea of creation, and the Patristic idea of creation. No matter how we understand them, these "Days" are quite beyond the comprehension of us who know only the corrupt "days" of our fallen world; how can we even imagine those Days when God's creative power was mightily at work?

The Holy Fathers themselves do not seem to speak much about this question, doubtless because *for them it was not a problem*. It is a problem for modern men chiefly *because they try to understand God's creation by means of the laws of nature of our fallen world*. It seems to be assumed by the Fathers that those Days, in duration, were not unlike the days we know, and some of them indeed specify that they were twenty-four hours in length, as does St. Ephraim. But there is one thing about these Days which it is most important for us to understand, and that concerns what you have written about whether God created "instantly."

You write: "Since God created time, to create something 'instantly' would be an act contrary to His own decision and will.... When we

speak about the creation of stars, plants, animals and man we do not speak about miracles—we do not speak about the extraordinary interventions of God in creation but about the ‘natural’ course of creation.” I wonder if you are not substituting here some “modern wisdom” for the teaching of the Holy Fathers? What is the *beginning* of all things but a *miracle*? I have already showed you that St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Damascene (and indeed all the Fathers) teach that the first man Adam appeared in a way *different from the natural generation of all other men*; likewise the first creatures, according to the sacred text of Genesis, appeared in a way different from all their descendants: they *appeared not by natural generation but by the word of God*. The modern theory of evolution denies this, because *the theory of evolution was invented by unbelievers who wished to deny God’s action in creation and explain the creation by “natural” means alone*. Do you not see what *philosophy* is behind the theory of evolution?

What do the Holy Fathers say about this? I have already quoted St. Ephraim the Syrian, whose whole commentary on Genesis describes how *all God’s creative acts are done in an instant*, even though the whole “Days” of creation last for twenty-four hours each. Let us now see what St. Basil the Great says about God’s creative acts in the Six Days.

In speaking of the Third Day of Creation, St. Basil says:

At this saying all the dense woods appeared; all the trees shot up.... Likewise, all the shrubs were *immediately* thick with leaf and bush; and the so-called garland plants ... all came into existence *in a moment of time, although they were not previous upon the earth*.¹⁸

Again, he says:

“Let the earth bring forth.” This brief command was *immediately* a mighty nature and an elaborate system which brought to perfection *more swiftly than our thought* the countless properties of plants.¹⁹

Again, on the Fifth Day:

The command came. *Immediately* rivers were productive and marshy lakes were fruitful of species proper and natural to each.* ²⁰

Likewise, St. John Chrysostom, in his commentary on Genesis, teaches:

Today God goes over to the waters and shows us that from them, by His word and command, there proceeded animate creatures. What mind, tell me, can understand *this miracle*? What tongue will be able worthily to glorify the Creator? He said only: "Let the earth bring forth"—and *immediately* He aroused it to bear fruit.... As of the earth He said only: "Let it bring forth"—and there appeared a great variety of flowers, grasses, and seeds, and everything occurred *by His word alone*; so also here He said: "Let the waters bring forth"... and *suddenly* there appeared so many kinds of creeping things, such a variety of birds, that it is impossible even to enumerate them with words.²¹

Here I will repeat: I believe that modern science in most cases knows more than St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Ephraim, and other Fathers about the properties of fishes and such specific scientific facts; no one will deny this. *But who knows more about the way in which God acts*: modern science, which is not even sure that God exists, and

* Recently Dr. Jonathan Wells, a molecular biologist, has further elucidated St. Basil's teaching on the Six Days of Creation, thus refuting those who would try to make this teaching compatible with evolutionism. Quoting from St. Basil's *Hexaemeron*, Dr. Wells writes: "The *Hexaemeron* as a whole makes it abundantly clear that the first instant [of creation] was followed by several more special acts of creation. When the heavens first came into being they were 'imperfect,' because the sun, moon and stars 'were not yet created.' These things were created later, by direct acts of God: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth; afterwards He created light, then He created the firmament.' The waters were initially 'scattered in many places,' and came together only after God said, 'Let the waters under the heaven be gathered unto one place.' And the earth remained 'unfinished' after its initial creation since it lacked the 'growth of all kinds of plants' until God specifically commanded the earth to 'bring forth grass' and 'produce fruit.'" (Jonathan Wells, "Abusing Theology," *Origins & Design*, vol. 19, no. 1). Ed.

in any case tries to explain everything without Him; or *these God-bearing Holy Fathers*? When you say that God does not create instantly, I believe that you are giving the teaching of modern "wisdom," *not* the teaching of the Holy Fathers.

Of course, there is a sense in which it is true that God's creation is not the work of an instant; but here also the Fathers are quite precise in their teaching. I have quoted St. Ephraim, who says: "It is likewise impermissible to say that what seems, according to the account, to have been created in the course of six days, was created in a single instant." With this in mind, let us look at the passage you have quoted from St. Gregory of Nyssa: "Man was created last after the plants and animals because nature follows a path which leads gradually to perfection." "It is as if by steps that nature makes its ascent in life properties from the least to the perfect." In quoting these passages, you have tried to understand them in the sense of the modern doctrine of evolution. But certainly it is not proper to read into these ancient texts the conclusions of modern philosophy! Here St. Gregory of Nyssa is surely teaching nothing different from what many other Fathers taught, based on a very "literal" understanding of Genesis.

Thus, St. Gregory the Theologian teaches, when he, like St. Ephraim, also states that the creation is not "instantaneous":

To the days (of creation) is added a certain firstness, secondness, thirdness, and so on to the seventh day of rest of works, and by these days is divided all that is created, being brought into order by unutterable laws, *but not produced in an instant* by the Almighty Word, for Whom to think or to speak means already to perform the deed. If man appeared in the world last, honored by the handiwork and image of God, this is not in the least surprising; since for him, as for a king, the royal dwelling had to be prepared and only then was the king to be led in, accompanied by all creatures.²²

Again, St. John Chrysostom teaches:

The Almighty right hand of God and His limitless wisdom would have had no difficulty in creating everything in a single day. And



St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory the Theologian.
*Icon by Monk Theophanes the Cretan, Stavronikita
Monastery, Mount Athos, sixteenth century.*

what do I say, in a single day?—in a single instant. But since He created everything that exists not for His own benefit, because He needs nothing, being All-sufficient unto Himself, on the contrary He created everything in His love of mankind and goodness, and so He creates in parts and offers us by the mouth of the blessed Prophet a clear teaching of what is created so that we, having found out about this in detail, would not fall under the influence of those who are drawn away by human reasonings.... And why, you will say, was

man created afterwards, if he surpassed all these creatures? For a good reason. When a king intends to enter a city, his armsbearers and others must go ahead, so that the king might enter chambers already prepared for him. Precisely thus did God now, intending to place as it were a king and master over everything earthly, at first arrange all this adornment, and only then did He create the master.²³

Thus the Patristic teaching is clearly that God, although He *could* have created everything instantly, chose instead to create it in stages of increasing perfection, *each stage* being the work of an instant or a very short time, culminating in the creation of man, the king of creation; and the whole work is completed, neither in an instant nor in an indefinitely long time, but as it were a mean between these two extremes, *precisely in six days*.

St. Ephraim and St. John Chrysostom, in their commentaries on Genesis, clearly regard God's creation as being the work of six "literal" days, on each one of which God creates "immediately" and "instantly." And St. Basil the Great also, contrary to a widespread belief of "Christian evolutionists," viewing God's creations as "immediate" and "sudden," regarded the Six Days as being precisely of twenty-four-hours' duration; for he says, regarding the First Day:

"There was evening and morning." *This means the space of a day and a night....* "And there was evening and morning, one day." Why did he say "one" and not "first"?... He said "one" because *he was defining the measure of day and night* and combining the time of a night and a day, *since the twenty-four hours fill up the interval of one day*, if, of course, night is understood with day.* ²⁴

* St. Ambrose, who read St. Basil's *Hexaemeron*, gave this same teaching in his own *Hexaemeron*. Concerning the close of the First Day of Creation, St. Ambrose wrote: "In notable fashion has Scripture spoken of a 'day,' not the 'first day.' Because a second, then a third, day, and finally the remaining days were to follow, a 'first day' could have been mentioned, following in this way the natural order. But Scripture established a law that twenty-four hours, including both day and night, should be given the name of day only, as if one were to say the length of one day is twenty-four hours in extent (St. Ambrose, *Hexaemeron* 1:37).—ED.

But even St. Gregory the Theologian, this most “contemplative” of Fathers, believed precisely the same thing, for he says:

*Just as the first creation begins with Sunday (and this is evident from the fact that the seventh day after it is Saturday, because it is the day of repose from works), so also the second creation begins again with the same day [i.e., the day of Resurrection].*²⁵

And again the Theologian says, giving the Patristic view of the kind of world into which Adam was placed:

The Word, having taken a part of *the newly created earth*, with His immortal hands formed my image....²⁶

As I have said, I do not regard this question as one of the first importance in discussing the question of evolution; but it is nevertheless quite symptomatic of the influence of modern philosophy on them, that “Christian evolutionists” are so anxious to *reinterpret* these Six Days so as not to appear foolish before the “wise men” of this world, who have “proved scientifically” that whatever “creation” there was took place over countless millions of years. Most importantly, the reason why “Christian evolutionists” have such difficulty believing in the Six Days of Creation, which gave no problem to the Holy Fathers, is because *they do not understand what happened in those Six Days*: they believe that long natural processes of development were going on, according to the laws of our present corrupt world; but in actual fact, according to the Holy Fathers, *the nature of that first-created world was quite different from our world*, as I will show below.

Let us look now more closely at another basic Patristic commentary on the book of Genesis, that of St. John Chrysostom. You will note that I am not quoting obscure or dubious Fathers, but only the very pillars of Orthodoxy, in whom our whole Orthodox teaching is the most clearly and divinely expressed. In him once again we find no “allegory” at all, but only the strict interpretation of the text *as it is written*. Like the other Fathers, he tells us that Adam was formed *literally from dust*, and Eve *literally from Adam’s rib*. He writes:

If the enemies of truth will insist that it is impossible to produce something from what is nonexistent, we will ask them: Was the first man created from earth, or not? Without doubt they will agree with us and say, Yes, from earth. Then let them tell us, how was flesh formed from earth? From earth there can be dirt, bricks, clay, tile: but how was flesh produced? How were bones, nerves, sinews, fat, skin, nails, hair (produced)? How, from the single material at hand, are there so many things of different qualities? To this they cannot even open their mouths (to reply).²

And again St. John Chrysostom writes:

God took a single rib, it is said: but how from this single rib did He form a whole creature? Tell me, how did the taking of the rib occur? How did Adam not feel this taking? You can say nothing about this; this is known only by Him Who created.... God did not produce a new creation, but taking from an already existing creation a certain small part, from this part He made a whole creature. What power the Highest Artist God has, to produce from this small part (a rib) the composition of so many members, make so many organs of sense, and form a whole, perfect, and complete being.²⁸

If you wish, I can quote many other passages from this work, showing that St. John Chrysostom—is he not the chief Orthodox interpreter of Sacred Scripture?—everywhere interprets the sacred text of Genesis *as it is written*, believing that it was nothing else than an actual *serpent* (through whom the devil spoke) who tempted our first parents in Paradise, that God actually brought all the animals before Adam for him to name, and “the names which Adam gave them remain even until now.”²⁹ (But according to evolutionary doctrine, many animals were extinct by the time of Adam—must we then believe that Adam did not name “all the wild beasts” [Gen. 2:19] but only the *remnant* of them?) St. John Chrysostom says, when speaking of the rivers of Paradise:

Perhaps one who loves to speak from *his own wisdom* here also will

not allow that the rivers are actually rivers, nor that the waters are precisely waters, but will instill in those who allow themselves to listen to them, that they (under the names of rivers and waters) represented something else. But I entreat you, *let us not pay heed to these people*, let us stop up our hearing against them, and let us believe the Divine Scripture, and following what is written in it, let us strive to preserve in our souls sound dogmas.³⁰

Is there need to quote more from this divine Father? Like St. Basil and St. Ephraim he warns us:

*Not to believe what is contained in the Divine Scripture, but to introduce something else from one's own mind—this, I believe, subjects those who hazard such a thing to great danger.*³¹

Before going on I will briefly answer one objection which I have heard from those who defend evolution: they say that if one reads all the Scripture “as it is written” one will only make oneself ridiculous. They say that if we must believe that Adam was actually made from dust and Eve from Adam’s rib, then must we not believe that God has “hands,” that He “walks” in Paradise, and the like absurdities? Such an objection could not be made by anyone who has read even a single commentary of the Holy Fathers on the book of Genesis. All the Holy Fathers distinguish between what is said about creation, which must be taken “as it is written” (unless it is an obvious metaphor or other figure of speech, such as “the sun knoweth his going down” of the Psalms; but this surely does not need to be explained to any but children), and what is said about God, which must be understood, as St. John Chrysostom says repeatedly, “in a God-befitting manner.” For example, St. John Chrysostom writes:

When you hear, beloved, that “God planted Paradise in Eden in the East,” understand the word “planted” befittingly of God: that is, that He commanded; but concerning the words that follow, *believe precisely that Paradise was created and in that very place where the Scripture has assigned it.*³²

St. John of Damascus, in his work *On Heresies*, explicitly describes the allegorical interpretation of Paradise to be part of a heresy, that of the Origenians:

They explain Paradise, the heaven, and everything else in an allegorical sense.³³

But what, then, are we to understand of those Holy Fathers of profound spiritual life who interpret the book of Genesis and other Holy Scriptures in a spiritual or mystical sense? *If we ourselves had not gone so far away from the Patristic understanding of Scripture, this would present no problem whatever to us.* The same text of Holy Scripture is true “as it is written,” and it *also* has a spiritual interpretation. Behold what the great Father of the desert, St. Macarius the Great, a clairvoyant Saint who raised the dead, says:

That Paradise was closed and that a Cherubim was commanded to prevent man from entering it by a flaming sword: of this we believe that *in visible fashion it was indeed just as it is written, and at the same time* we find that this occurs mystically in every soul.³⁴

Our modern “Patristic scholars,” who approach the Holy Fathers not as living founts of tradition but only as dead “academic sources,” invariably misunderstand this very important point. Any Orthodox Christian who *lives* in the tradition of the Holy Fathers knows that when a Holy Father interprets a passage of Holy Scripture spiritually or allegorically, *he is not thereby denying its literal meaning*, which *he assumes* the reader knows enough to accept. I will give a clear example of this.

The divine Gregory the Theologian, in his Homily on the Theophany, writes concerning the Tree of Knowledge:

The tree was, according to my view, Contemplation, upon which it is only safe for those who have reached maturity of habit to enter.³⁵

This is a profound spiritual interpretation, and I do not know of any passage in this Father’s writings where he says explicitly that this

tree was also a literal tree, "as it is written." Is it therefore an "open question," as our academic scholars might tell us, whether he completely "allegorized" the story of Adam and Paradise?

Of course, we know from other writings of St. Gregory that he did *not* allegorize Adam and Paradise. But even more important, we have the direct testimony of another great Father concerning the very question of St. Gregory's interpretation of the Tree of Knowledge.

But before I give this testimony I must make sure you agree with me on a basic principle of interpreting the writings of the Holy Fathers. *When they are giving the teaching of the Church, the Holy Fathers* (if only they *are* genuine Holy Fathers and not merely ecclesiastical writers of uncertain authority) *do not contradict each other*, even if to our feeble understanding there *seem* to be contradictions between them. It is academic rationalism that pits one Father against another, traces their "influence" on each other, divides them into "schools" and "factions," and finds "contradictions" between them. All of this is foreign to the Orthodox Christian understanding of the Holy Fathers. For us the Orthodox teaching of the Holy Fathers is one single whole, and since the whole of Orthodox teaching is obviously not contained in any one Father (for all the Fathers are human and thus limited), we find parts of it in one Father and other parts in another Father, and one Father explains what is obscure in another Father; and it is not even of primary importance for us who said what, as long as it is Orthodox and in harmony with the whole Patristic teaching. I am sure that you agree with me on this principle and that you will not be surprised that I am now going to present an interpretation of the words of St. Gregory the Theologian by a great Holy Father who lived a thousand years after him: St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica.

Against St. Gregory Palamas and the other hesychast Fathers who taught the true Orthodox doctrine of the "Uncreated Light" of Mt. Tabor, there rose up the Western rationalist Barlaam. Taking advantage of the fact that St. Maximus the Confessor in one passage had called this Light of the Transfiguration a "symbol of theology," Barlaam taught that this Light was not a manifestation of the Divinity, but only something bodily, not "literally" Divine Light, but only a "symbol" of

it. This led St. Gregory Palamas to make a reply which illuminates for us the relation between the "symbolical" and "literal" interpretation of Holy Scripture, particularly with regard to the passage from St. Gregory the Theologian which I have quoted above. He writes that Barlaam and others

do not see that Maximus, wise in Divine matters, has called the Light of the Lord's Transfiguration a "symbol of theology" only by analogy and in a spiritual sense. In fact, in a theology which is analogical and intended to elevate us, objects which have an existence of their own become themselves, in fact and in words, symbols by homonymy; it is in this sense that Maximus calls this Light a "symbol."... Similarly, Gregory the Theologian has called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil "contemplation," having in his contemplation considered it as a symbol of this "contemplation" which is intended to elevate us; *but it does not follow that what is involved is an illusion or a symbol without existence of its own.* For the divine Maximus also makes Moses the symbol of judgment, and Elijah the symbol of foresight! *Are they too then supposed not to have really existed,* but to have been invented "symbolically"? And could not Peter, for one who would wish to elevate himself in contemplation, become a symbol of faith, James of hope, and John of love?³⁶

It would be possible to multiply such quotations which show what the Holy Fathers actually taught about the interpretation of Holy Scripture, and in particular of the book of Genesis; but I have already presented enough to show that the genuine Patristic teaching on this subject presents grave difficulties for one who would like to interpret the book of Genesis in accordance with modern ideas and "wisdom," and indeed the Patristic interpretation makes it *quite impossible* to harmonize the account of Genesis with the theory of evolution, which requires an entirely "allegorical" interpretation of the text in many places where the Patristic interpretation will not allow this. The doctrine that Adam was created, not from the dust, but by development from some other creature, is a novel teaching which is entirely foreign to Orthodox Christianity.

At this point the "Orthodox evolutionist" might try to salvage his position (of believing *both* in the modern theory of evolution *and* in the teaching of the Holy Fathers) in one of two ways.

a. He may try to say that we now know more than the Holy Fathers about nature and therefore we really can interpret the book of Genesis better than they. But even the "Orthodox evolutionist" knows that the book of Genesis is *not a scientific treatise*, but a Divinely inspired work of cosmogony and theology. The interpretation of the Divinely inspired Scripture is clearly the work of God-bearing theologians, not of natural scientists, who ordinarily do not know the very first principles of such interpretation. It is true that in the book of Genesis many "facts" of nature are presented. But it must be carefully noted that these facts are not facts such as we can observe now, but an entirely special kind of facts: the creation of the heaven and the earth, of all animals and plants, of the first man. I have already pointed out that the Holy Fathers teach quite clearly that the creation of the first man Adam, for example, is *quite different* from the generation of men today; it is only the latter that science can observe, and about the creation of Adam it offers only *philosophical speculations*, not scientific knowledge.

According to the Holy Fathers, *it is possible for us to know something of this first-created world*, but this knowledge is *not* accessible to natural science. I will discuss this question further below.

b. Or again, the "Orthodox evolutionist," in order to preserve the unquestioned Patristic interpretation of at least some of the facts described in Genesis, may begin to make arbitrary modifications of the theory of evolution itself, in order to make it "fit" the text of Genesis. Thus, one "Orthodox evolutionist" might decide that the creation of the first man must be a "special creation" which does not fit into the general pattern of the rest of creation, and thus he can believe the Scriptural account of the creation of Adam more or less "as it is written," while believing in the rest of the Six Days' Creation in accordance with "evolutionary science"; while another "Orthodox evolutionist" might accept the "evolution" of man himself from lower creatures, while specifying that Adam, the "first-evolved man," appeared only in very recent times (in the evolutionary time scale of "mil-

lions of years"), thus preserving at least the historical reality of Adam and the other Patriarchs as well as the universally held Patristic opinion (about which I can speak in another letter, if you wish) that Adam was created about 7,500 years ago. I am sure you will agree with me that such rationalistic devices are quite foolish and futile. If the universe "evolves," as modern philosophy teaches, then man "evolves" with it, and we must accept whatever all-knowing "science" tells us about the age of man; but if the Patristic teaching is correct, it is correct regarding *both* man and the rest of creation.

If you can explain to me how one can accept the Patristic interpretation of the book of Genesis and still believe in evolution, I will be glad to listen to you; but you will also have to give me better *scientific* evidence for evolution than that which so far exists, for to the objective and dispassionate observer the "scientific evidence" for evolution is extremely weak.

5. "*By Man Came Death*" (1 Corinthians 15:21)

Now I come at last to the two most important questions which are raised by the theory of evolution: the nature of the first-created world, and the nature of the first-created man Adam.

I believe you express correctly the Patristic teaching when you say: "The animals became corrupted because of man; the law of the jungle is a consequence of the fall of man." I also agree with you, as I have already said, that man, on the side of his body, is bound together with and is an organic part of the whole of the visible creation, and this helps make it understandable how the whole creation fell together with him into death and corruption. But you think that this is a proof of evolution, a proof that man's body evolved from some other creature! Surely if this is the case, the God-inspired Fathers would have known about it, and we would not have had to wait for the atheist philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to discover this and tell us about it!!

No, the Holy Fathers believed that the whole creation fell with

Adam, but they did *not* believe that Adam “evolved” from some other creature; why should I believe differently from the Holy Fathers?

Now I come to a very important point. You ask: “How is it that the fall of Adam brought corruption and the law of the jungle to the animals, since animals have been created before Adam? We know that animals died, killed and devoured one another since their first appearance on earth and not only after the appearance of man.”*

How do you know this? Are you sure that this is what the Holy Fathers teach? You explain your point, not by quoting any Holy Fathers, but by giving a philosophy of “time.” I certainly agree with you that God is outside of time; to Him everything is present. But this fact is not a proof that animals, who died *because* of Adam, died *before* he fell.**
What do the Holy Fathers say?

It is true, of course, that most Holy Fathers speak about animals as already corruptible and mortal; but they are speaking about their fallen state. What about their state before the transgression of Adam?

There is a very significant hint about this in the commentary on Genesis of St. Ephraim the Syrian. When speaking of the “skins” which God made for Adam and Eve after their transgression, St. Ephraim writes:

* Not only “Christian evolutionists” such as Dr. Kalomiros, but also “old-earth/progressive creationists” (who do not believe in evolution *per se* but accept the evolutionary schema of “millions of years”) are forced by their position to conclude that there were millions of years of death and decay before the appearance of man. Here is one example from an old-earth/progressive creationist article intended as a catechesis for children:

“Starting about 2 to 4 million years ago God began creating man-like mammals or ‘hominids.’ These creatures stood on two feet, had large brains, and used tools. Some even buried their dead and painted on cave walls. However, they were very different from us. They had no spirit. They did not have consciences like we do. They did not worship God or establish religious practices.

“In time, all these man-like creatures went extinct. Then, about 10 to 25 thousand years ago, God replaced them with Adam and Eve” (Hugh Ross, “Genesis One, Dinosaurs, and Cavemen”). ED.

** In his letter, Dr. Kalomiros had argued that, since God is outside time, Adam’s fall had a *retroactive* effect on all the other creatures; thus, “animals were in corruption long before the appearance of man on earth.”—ED.

One may suppose that the first parents, touching their waists with their hands, found that they were clothed with garments made of animal skins—killed, it may be, before their very eyes, so that they might eat their meat, cover their nakedness with the skins, *and in their very death might see the death of their own body.*³⁷

I will discuss below the Patristic teaching of the immortality of Adam before his transgression, but here I am only interested in the question of whether animals died before the fall. Why should St. Ephraim suggest that Adam would learn about death by seeing the death of animals—*if he had already seen the death of animals before his transgression* (which he certainly had according to the evolutionary view)? But this is only a suggestion; there are other Holy Fathers who speak quite definitely on this subject; as I will show in a moment.

But first I must ask you: if it is true as you say that animals died and the creation was corrupted *before* the transgression of Adam, then how can it be that God looked at His creation after every one of the Days of Creation and “saw that it was good,” and after creating the animals on the Fifth and Sixth Days He “saw that they were good,” and at the end of the Six Days, after the creation of man, “God saw all the things that He had made, and behold, they were very good.” How could they be “good” if they were already mortal and corruptible, contrary to God’s plan for them? The Divine services of the Orthodox Church contain many moving passages of *lamentation* about the “corrupted creation,” as well as expressions of joy that Christ by His Resurrection has “recalled the corrupted creation.” *How could God see this lamentable condition of the creation and say that it was “very good”?*

And again, we read in the sacred text of Genesis: “And God said, Behold I have given to you every seed-bearing herb sowing seed which is upon all the earth, and every tree which has in itself the fruit of seed that is sown, to you it shall be for food. And to all the wild beasts of the earth, and to all the flying creatures of heaven, and to every reptile creeping on the earth, which has in itself the breath of life, even *every green plant for food*; and it was so” (Gen. 1:29–30). Why, if the animals devoured each other before the fall, as you say, did God give them, even “*all the wild beasts and every reptile*” (many of which are now

strictly carnivorous) only “green plants for food”? Only long after the transgression of Adam did God say to Noah: “And every reptile which is living *shall be to you for meat; I have given all things to you as the green herbs*” (Gen. 9:3). Do you not sense here the presence of a mystery which so far has escaped you *because you insist on interpreting the sacred text of Genesis by means of modern evolutionary philosophy*, which will not admit that animals could ever have been *of a nature different from that which they now possess?*

But the Holy Fathers clearly teach that the animals (as well as man) were *different* before the transgression of Adam! Thus St. John Chrysostom writes:

It is clear that man in the beginning had complete authority over the animals.... But that now we are afraid and terrified of beasts and do not have authority over them, this I do not deny.... *In the beginning it was not so, but the beasts feared and trembled and submitted to their master.* But when through disobedience he lost boldness, then also his authority was diminished. That all animals were subject to man, hear what the Scripture says: He brought the beasts and all irrational creatures “to Adam to see what he would call them” (Gen. 2:19). And he, seeing the beasts near him, did not run away, but like another lord he gives names to the slaves which are subject to him, since he gave names to all animals.... This is already sufficient as proof that beasts in the beginning were not frightful for man. But there is another proof not less powerful and even clearer. Which? The conversation of the serpent with the woman. If the beast had been frightful to man, then seeing the serpent the woman would not have stopped, would not have taken his advice, would not have conversed with him with such fearlessness, but immediately on seeing him would have been terrified and run away. But behold, she converses and is not afraid; *there was not yet then any fear.*³⁸

Is it not clear that St. John Chrysostom reads the first part of the text of Genesis “as it is written,” as an *historical* account of the state of man and creation before the transgression of Adam, when both man and

animals were different from what they now are? Similarly, St. John Damascene tells us that

*at that time the earth brought forth of itself fruits for the use of the animals that were subject to man, and there were neither violent rains upon the earth nor wintry storms. But after the fall, "when he was compared to senseless beasts and was become like to them" ... then the creation subject to him rose up against this ruler appointed by the Creator.*³⁹

Perhaps you will object that in the same place St. John Damascene also says, speaking of the creation of animals, "Everything was for the suitable use of man. Of the animals, *some were for food*, such as deer, sheep, gazelles, and the like." But you must read this passage *in context*; for at the end of this paragraph we read (just as you have noted that God created man male and female *foreknowing* Adam's transgression):

God knew all things before they were made and *He saw that man in his freedom would fall and be given over to corruption*; yet for man's suitable use He made all the things that are in the sky and on the earth and in the water.⁴⁰

Do you not see from the Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers that God creates creatures so that they will be useful to man *even in his corrupted state*; but *He does not create them already corrupted*, and they were not corrupted *until Adam sinned*.

But let us turn now to a Holy Father who speaks quite explicitly about *the incorruption of the creation before Adam's disobedience*: St. Gregory the Sinaite. He is a Holy Father of the highest spiritual life and theological soundness, who attained to the heights of Divine vision. In the Russian *Philokalia* he writes:

The presently existing creation was not originally created corruptible; but afterwards it fell under corruption, "being made subject to vanity," according to the Scripture, "not willingly, but by reason of him," Adam, "who hath subjected it in hope" of the renewal of Adam who

had become subject to corruption (Rom. 8:20). He Who renewed and sanctified Adam has renewed the creation also, but He has not yet delivered it from corruption.⁴¹

Further, the same Father gives us remarkable details about the state of the creation (in particular, Paradise) before Adam's transgression:

Eden is a place in which there was planted by God every kind of fragrant plant. It is neither completely incorruptible, nor entirely corruptible. *Placed between corruption and incorruption*, it is always both abundant in fruits and blossoming with flowers, both mature and immature. The mature trees and fruits are converted into fragrant earth *which does not give off any odor of corruption, as do the trees of this world*. This is from the abundance of the grace of sanctification which is constantly poured forth there.⁴²

(This passage is expressed in the present tense—*because the Paradise in which Adam was placed is still in existence*, but is not visible to our normal sense organs.)

What will you say of these passages? Will you still be so certain, as “uniformitarian” evolutionary philosophy teaches, that the creation *before* the fall was just the same as it is now after the fall? The Holy Scripture teaches us that “*God made not death*” (Wisdom 1:13), and St. John Chrysostom teaches that

just as the creature became corruptible *when your body became corruptible*, so also when your body will be incorrupt, the creature also will follow after it and become corresponding to it (*Homilies on Romans*).⁴³

And St. Macarius the Great says:

Adam was placed as the lord and king of all creatures.... But *after his captivity*, there was taken captive together with him the creation which served him and submitted to him, because through him death came to reign over every soul.⁴⁴

The teaching of the Holy Fathers, if we accept it "as it is written" and do not try to reinterpret it by means of our human wisdom, is clearly that *the state of creatures before the transgression of Adam was quite different from their present state*. I am not trying to tell you that I know precisely what this state was; this state between corruption and incorruption is very mysterious to us who live entirely in corruption. Another great Orthodox Father, St. Symeon the New Theologian, teaches that *the law of nature we now know is different from the law of nature before Adam's transgression*. He writes:

The words and decrees of God become the law of nature. Therefore also the decree of God, uttered by Him as a result of the disobedience of the first Adam—that is, the decree to him of death and corruption—*became the law of nature, eternal and unalterable*.⁴⁵

What the "law of nature" was before Adam's transgression, which of us sinful men can define? *Certainly natural science, bound up entirely with its observation of the present state of creation, cannot investigate it.*

Then how do we know anything at all about it? Obviously, because God has revealed something of it to us through the Sacred Scripture. But we know, also, from the writings of St. Gregory the Sinaite (and other writings which I shall quote below), that God has revealed something besides what is in the Scriptures. And this brings me to another extremely important question raised by evolution.

6. Divine Vision

What is the source of our true knowledge of the first-created world, and how is it different from science? How can St. Gregory the Sinaite know what happens to the ripe fruits of Paradise, and why can natural science not discover such a thing? Since you are a lover of the Holy Fathers, I believe you already know the answer to this question. Still, I will set forth the answer, based not on my own reasoning but on the unquestionable authority of a Holy Father of the highest spiritual life, St. Isaac the Syrian, who spoke of the soul's ascent to God *based on his*

own experience of it. In describing how the soul is enraptured at the thought of the future age of incorruption, St. Isaac writes:

And from this one is already exalted in his mind to that which preceded the composition of the world, when there was no creature, nor heaven, nor earth, nor angels, nothing of that which was brought into being, and to how God, solely by His good will, *suddenly brought everything from non-being into being*, and everything stood before Him in perfection.⁴⁶

Do you see that St. Gregory the Sinaite and other Holy Fathers of the highest spiritual life beheld the first-created world *in the state of Divine vision*, which is beyond all natural knowledge? St. Gregory the Sinaite himself states that the "eight primary visions" of the state of perfect prayer are: (1) God, (2) the angelic powers, (3) *"the composition of visible things,"* (4) the condescension of the Word (the Incarnation), (5) the universal resurrection, (6) the Second Coming of Christ, (7) eternal torments, (8) the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.⁴⁷ Why should the "composition of visible things" be included together with the other objects of Divine vision which are all within the sphere of theological knowledge alone, and not scientific knowledge? Is it not because there is an aspect and state of creatures *beyond the sphere of scientific knowledge*, which can only be seen, as St. Isaac himself saw God's creation, in vision by God's grace? The objects of these visions, St. Gregory teaches, "are clearly beheld and known by those who have attained by grace complete purity of mind."⁴⁸

In another place St. Isaac the Syrian clearly describes *the difference between natural knowledge and faith*, which leads to vision.

Knowledge is a rule of nature, and this rule preserves it in all its steps. But faith performs its journey *above nature*. *Knowledge does not attempt to permit anything to come to it which is subversive of nature*, but avoids this; but faith permits this and says: "Thou shalt tread upon the asp and the basilisk, and thou shalt trample on the lion and the dragon" (Ps. 90:13).... Many by faith have entered flames, bridled the burning power of fire and passed unharmed through its

midst, and walked on the surface of the sea as on dry land. But all this is above nature, contrary to the capabilities of knowledge, and it is shown that the latter is vain in all its capabilities and laws. *Do you see how knowledge preserves the bounds of nature? Do you see how faith goes above nature* and there traces the steps of its path? The capabilities of knowledge for 5,000 years, or a little more or less than this, governed the world, and man in no way could raise his head from the earth and acknowledge his Creator, until our faith shone forth and delivered us from the darkness of earthly doing and vain submission to the empty soaring of the mind. And even now, when we have found an imperturbable sea and an inexhaustible treasure, again we desire to turn away toward tiny springs. There is no knowledge that would not be poor, no matter how much it might be enriched. But the treasures of faith can be contained neither by the heaven nor by the earth.⁴⁹

Do you now see what is at stake in the argument between the Patristic understanding of Genesis and the doctrine of evolution? The doctrine of evolution attempts to understand the mysteries of God's creation by means of natural knowledge and worldly philosophy, not even allowing the possibility that there is something in these mysteries which places them beyond its capabilities of knowing; while the book of Genesis is an account of God's creation *as seen in Divine vision by the God-seer Moses*, and this vision is confirmed also by the experience of later Holy Fathers. Now, even though revealed knowledge is higher than natural knowledge, still we know that there can be no conflict between *true* revelation and *true* natural knowledge. But there *can* be conflict between revelation and *human philosophy*, which is often in error. There is thus no conflict between the knowledge of creation contained in Genesis, as interpreted for us by the Holy Fathers, and the *true* knowledge of creatures which modern science has acquired by observation; but there most certainly is an irreconcilable conflict between the knowledge contained in Genesis *and the vain philosophical speculations of modern scientists, unenlightened by faith, about the state of the world in the Six Days of Creation*. Where there is a genuine conflict between Genesis and modern philosophy, *if we wish to know the truth we*

must accept the teaching of the Holy Fathers and reject the false opinions of scientific philosophers. The world has now become so infected by vain modern philosophy *posing as science* that very few, even among Orthodox Christians, are willing or able to examine this question dispassionately and discover what the Holy Fathers *really* taught, *and then accept the Patristic teaching even if it seems utter foolishness to the vain wisdom of this world.*

Concerning the true Patristic view of the first-created world, already I think I have indicated enough to you of the Patristic views which at first sight seem "surprising" to an Orthodox Christian whose understanding of Genesis has been obscured by modern scientific philosophy. Most "surprising" of all, perhaps, is the fact that the Holy Fathers understood the text of Genesis "as it is written," and do not allow us to interpret it "freely" or allegorically. Many Orthodox Christians with a "modern education" have become accustomed to associating such an interpretation with Protestant fundamentalism, and they are afraid of being considered "naive" by sophisticated scientific philosophers; but it is clear how much more profound is the true Patristic interpretation than that of the fundamentalists, on the one hand, who have never even heard of Divine vision and whose interpretation sometimes coincides with that of the Holy Fathers only by accident, as it were; and on the other hand, how much more profound is the Patristic interpretation than that of those who uncritically accept the speculations of modern philosophy as if they were true knowledge.

It may help the "modern" Orthodox Christian to understand how the incorruption of the first-created world is beyond the competence of science to investigate, if he would examine the fact of incorruption *as it has been manifested by God's action even in our present corrupted world.* We can find no higher manifestation of this incorruption than in the Most Holy Mother of God, of Whom we sing: "Thee Who *without corruption* gavest birth to God the Word, true Mother of God, we magnify." The Theotokia of our Orthodox Divine services are full of this doctrine. St. John Damascene points out that in two respects this "incorruption" is *beyond the laws of nature.* "So far as He had no father, (Christ's) birth was above the nature of generation," and "in that His birth was painless, it was above the laws of genera-

tion.”⁵⁰ What does the Orthodox Christian say when a modern unbeliever, under the influence of modern naturalistic philosophy, insists that such “incorruption” is “impossible,” and demands that Christians believe only what can be proved or observed by science? Does he not hold to his faith, which is a revealed knowledge, *in spite of “science” and its philosophy*? Does he not indeed tell this pseudoscientist that *he cannot possibly know or understand this fact of incorruption, inasmuch as the works of God are above nature*? Then why should we hesitate to believe the truth about the creation before Adam’s fall, if we become convinced that the Holy Fathers indeed teach us that it is something quite beyond the competence of science to investigate or know? One who accepts the evolutionary philosophy of the creation before Adam’s transgression, and thus rejects the Patristic teaching, only prepares the way in his own soul, and in the souls of others, to accept an evolutionary or other pseudoscientific view of many other Orthodox doctrines also. We hear today many Orthodox priests who tell us, “Our faith in Christ does not depend on how we interpret Genesis. You can believe as you wish.” But how can it be that our negligence in understanding one part of God’s revelation (which, by the way, is indeed closely bound up with Christ, the Second Adam, Who became incarnate *in order to restore us to our original state*) will not lead to negligence in understanding the whole doctrine of the Orthodox Church? It is not for nothing that St. John Chrysostom closely binds together *the correct and strict interpretation of Scripture (specifically Genesis) and the correct dogmas which are essential for our SALVATION*. Speaking of those who interpret the book of Genesis allegorically, he says:

Let us not pay heed to these people, let us stop up our hearing against them, and let us believe the Divine Scripture, and following what is said in it, let us strive to preserve in our souls sound dogmas, and at the same time to lead also a right life, so that our life would both testify of the dogmas, and the dogmas would give firmness to our life.... If we live well but will be negligent over right dogmas, we can acquire nothing for our salvation. If we wish to be delivered from Gehenna and receive the Kingdom, we must be adorned both

with the one and with the other—both with rightness of dogmas, and strictness of life.⁵¹

There is one other question regarding the state of the first-created world about which you may wonder: what about the “millions of years” of the world’s existence which science “knows to be a fact”? This letter is already too long and I cannot discuss this question here. But if you wish, in another letter I can discuss this question also, including the “radiocarbon” and other “absolute” dating systems, giving you *the views of reputable scientists* about them and showing you how these “millions of years” also are *not at all a fact* but only more “philosophy.” This very idea was never even thought of until men, *under the influence of naturalistic philosophy*, began already to *believe* in evolution and saw that if evolution is true, then the world *must* be millions of years old (since evolution *has never been observed*, it is conceivable *only* under the supposition of countless millions of years which can bring about those processes which are too “minute” for contemporary scientists to see). If you will examine this question objectively and dispassionately, *separating genuine evidence from suppositions and philosophy*, you will see, I believe, that there is no genuine factual evidence which requires us to believe that the earth is more than 7,500 years old. What one believes about this is *entirely dependent on his philosophy of the creation*.

To sum up the Patristic teaching of the first-created world I can do no better than to copy out the divine words of a Holy Father who so shone forth in mental prayer that he was only the third Father to be called by the entire Orthodox Church “Theologian”: I mean St. Symeon the New Theologian. In his 45th Homily (Russian edition), speaking from Patristic tradition and probably also from his own experience, he says:

God, in the beginning, before He planted Paradise and gave it over to the first-created ones, in five days established the earth and what is in it, and the heaven and what is in it, and on the Sixth Day He created Adam and placed him as lord and king of the whole visible creation. Paradise then did not yet exist. But this world was from God as a kind of Paradise, although it was material and sensual. God

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gave it over into the authority of Adam and all his descendants.... "And God planted Paradise in Eden in the East. And God made to spring up also out of the earth every tree beautiful to the eye and good for food" (Gen. 2:8-9), *with various fruits which never spoiled and never ceased, but were always fresh and sweet* and afforded a great satisfaction and pleasantness for the first-created ones. For it was necessary *that an incorruptible delight be furnished for those bodies of the first-created ones, which were incorrupt.... Adam was created with a body that was incorrupt*, even though material and not yet spiritual, and he was placed by the Creator God *as an immortal king over an incorrupt world, not only over Paradise, but also over the whole creation* which was under the heavens....

(After Adam's transgression) God did not curse Paradise ... but He cursed only the whole rest of the earth, *which was also incorrupt* and produced everything by itself.... He who had become corrupt and mortal by reason of the transgression of the commandment, in all justice had to live also on a corruptible earth and eat corruptible food.... Then also all creatures, when they saw that Adam was banished from Paradise, no longer wished to submit to him the transgressor.... But God restrained all these creatures by His power, and in His compassion and goodness He did not allow them immediately to rush against man, and He commanded that the creation should remain in submission to him and, *having become corruptible*, should serve corruptible man for whom it was created, with the intention that when man should again be renewed and become spiritual, incorrupt, and immortal, and the whole creation, which had been subjected by God to man in bondage to him, should be delivered from this bondage, it would be renewed together with him and become incorrupt and as it were spiritual....

It is not fitting for the bodies of men to be clothed in the glory of resurrection and become incorrupt before the renewal of all creatures. But as in the beginning, *first the whole creation was created incorrupt, and then from it was taken and created man*, so also it is fitting that first the whole creation should become incorrupt, and then the corrupt bodies of men should be renewed and become incorrupt, that again the whole man might be incorrupt and spiritual

and that he might dwell in an incorrupt, eternal and spiritual dwelling.... Do you see that *this whole creation in the beginning was incorrupt and created by God in the order of Paradise? But afterwards* it was subjected by God to corruption and submitted to the vanity of men.

You should know likewise what is to be the brightly shining state of the creation in the future age. For when it will be renewed, it will not be again the same as it was when it was created in the beginning. But it will be such as, according to the word of the divine Paul, our body will be. . . The whole creation, by God's command, after the general resurrection is to be not such as it was created—material and sensual—but it will be re-created and will become a certain immaterial and spiritual dwelling, far above every organ of sense.⁵²

Could there be any clearer teaching of the state of the first-created world before the transgression of Adam?

7. The Nature of Man

And now I come to the final and most important question which is raised for Orthodox theology by the modern theory of evolution: *the nature of man*, and in particular *the nature of the first-created man Adam*. I say that this is the "most important question" raised by evolution because the doctrine of man, anthropology, touches most closely upon theology, and here, perhaps, it becomes most possible to identify theologically the error of evolutionism. It is well known that Orthodoxy teaches quite differently from Roman Catholicism regarding man's nature and Divine grace, and now I shall attempt to show that the theological view of man's nature which is implied in the theory of evolution, and which you have explicitly set forth in your letter, is *not* the Orthodox view of man, but is much closer to the *Roman Catholic* view; and this is only a confirmation of the fact that the theory of evolution, far from being taught by any Orthodox Father, is simply a product of the Western apostate mentality and even, despite the fact that it originally was a "reaction" against Roman Ca-

tholicism and Protestantism, has deep roots in the Roman Catholic scholastic tradition.

The view of human nature and the creation of Adam which you set forth in your letter is very much influenced by your opinion that Adam, in his body, was an "evolved beast." This opinion you have obtained, not from the Holy Fathers (for you cannot find one Father who believed this, and I have already showed you that the Fathers indeed believe quite "literally" that Adam was created from the dust and not from any other creature), but from modern science. Let us then look, first of all, at the Orthodox Patristic view of the nature and value of secular, scientific knowledge, particularly in relation to revealed, theological knowledge.

This Patristic view is very well set forth by the great hesychast Father, St. Gregory Palamas, who was forced to defend Orthodox theology and spiritual experience precisely against a Western rationalist, Barlaam, who wished to reduce the spiritual experience and knowledge of hesychasm to something attainable by science and philosophy. In answering him, St. Gregory set forth general principles which are well applicable in our own day when scientists and philosophers think they can understand the mysteries of creation and man's nature better than Orthodox theology. He writes:

The beginning of wisdom is to be sufficiently wise to distinguish and prefer to the wisdom which is low, terrestrial and vain, that which is truly useful, heavenly, and spiritual, that which comes from God and conducts toward Him and which renders conformable to God those who acquire it.⁵³

He teaches that the latter wisdom alone is good in itself, while the former is both good and evil:

The practice of the graces of different languages, the power of rhetoric, historical knowledge, the discovery of the mysteries of nature, the various methods of logic ... all these things are at the same time good and evil, not only *because they are manifested according to the idea of those who use them and easily take the form which is given*

*them by the point of view of those who possess them, but also because the study of them is a good thing only to the degree that it develops in the eye of the soul a penetrating view. But it is bad for one who gives himself over to this study in order to remain in it until old age.*⁵⁴

Further, even

if one of the Fathers says the same thing as do those from without, *the concordance is only verbal, the thought being quite different.* The former, in fact, have, according to Paul, "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), while the latter express at best a human reasoning. "As the heaven is distant from the earth, so is My thought distant from your thought" (Is. 55:9), saith the Lord. Besides, even if the thinking of these men were at times the same as that of Moses, Solomon, or their imitators, what would it benefit them? What man of sound spirit and belonging to the Church could from this draw the conclusion that their teaching comes from God?⁵⁵

From secular knowledge, St. Gregory writes,

*we absolutely forbid to expect any precision whatever in the knowledge of Divine things; for it is not possible to draw from it any certain teaching on the subject of God. For "God hath made it foolish."*⁵⁶

And this knowledge can also be harmful and fight against true theology:

*The power of this reason which has been made foolish and nonexistent enters into battle against those who accept the traditions in simplicity of heart; it despises the writings of the spirit, after the example of men who have treated them carelessly and have set up the creation against the Creator.*⁵⁷

There could hardly be a better account than this of what modern "Christian evolutionists" have tried to do by thinking themselves wiser

than the Holy Fathers, *using secular knowledge to reinterpret the teaching of the Sacred Scripture and the Holy Fathers*. Who can fail to see that the rationalistic, naturalistic spirit of Barlaam is quite close to that of modern evolutionism?

But notice that St. Gregory is speaking of scientific knowledge which, on its own level, is *true*; it becomes false only by warring against the higher knowledge of theology. Is the theory of evolution even *true* scientifically?

I have already spoken in this letter of the dubious nature of the scientific evidence for evolution in general, about which I would be glad to write you in another letter. Here I must say a word specifically about the scientific evidence for *human evolution*, since here we already begin to touch on the realm of Orthodox theology.

You say in your letter that you are happy not to have read the writings of Teilhard de Chardin and other exponents of evolution in the West; you approach this whole question "simply." But I am afraid that this is where you have made a mistake. It is well and good to accept the writings of the Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers *simply; that is the way they should be accepted*, and that is the way I try to accept them. But why should we accept the writings of modern scientists and philosophers "simply," merely taking their word when they tell us that something is true—even if *this acceptance forces us to change our theological views*? On the contrary, *we must be very critical* when modern wise men tell us how we should interpret the Holy Scriptures. We must be critical not only with regard to their philosophy, but also with regard to the "scientific evidence" which they think supports this philosophy; for *often this "scientific evidence" is itself philosophy*.

This is especially true of the Jesuit scientist Teilhard de Chardin; for not only has he written the most thorough and influential philosophy and theology based on evolution, *but he was also closely connected with the discovery and interpretation of almost all the fossil evidence for the "evolution of man" that was discovered in his lifetime*.

And now I must ask you a very elementary scientific question: *what is the evidence for the "evolution of man"*? About this question too I cannot go into in detail in this letter, but I will discuss it briefly. I can write more in detail later, if you wish.

The scientific fossil evidence for the "evolution of man" consists of: Neanderthal Man (many specimens); Peking Man (several skulls); the "men" called Java, Heidelberg, Piltdown (until twenty years ago), and the recent finds in Africa: *all extremely fragmentary*; and a few other fragments. *The total fossil evidence for the "evolution of man" could be contained in a box the size of a coffin*, and it is from widely separated parts of the earth, with no reliable indication of even *relative* (much less "absolute") age, and *with no indication whatever of how these different "men" were connected with each other*, whether by descent or kinship.

Further, one of these "evolutionary ancestors of man," "Piltdown Man," was discovered twenty years ago to have been a *deliberate fraud*. Now it is an interesting fact that Teilhard de Chardin was *one of the "discoverers" of "Piltdown Man"*—a fact which you will not find in most textbooks or in biographies of him. He "discovered" the canine tooth of this fabricated creature—a tooth which had already been dyed with the intent to cause deception regarding its age when he found it! I do not have the evidence to say that Teilhard de Chardin consciously participated in fraud; I think it more likely that he was the victim of the actual perpetrator of the fraud, and that *he was so anxious to find proof for the "evolution of man" in which he already believed* that he simply did not pay any attention to the anatomical difficulties which this crudely fabricated "man" presented to any objective observer. And yet in evolutionary textbooks printed before the discovery of the fraud, Piltdown Man is accepted as an evolutionary ancestor of man *without question*; his "skull" is even illustrated (even though only fragments of a cranium had been discovered); and it is confidently stated that "he combines human characteristics with others far retarded" (Tracy I. Storer, *General Zoology*, 1951). This, of course, is just what is required for a "missing link" between man and ape; and that is why the Piltdown fraud *was composed precisely of a mixture of human and ape bones*.

Some time later this same Teilhard de Chardin participated in the discovery, and above all in the "interpretation," of "Peking Man." Thanks to his "interpretation" (for by then he had established a reputation as one of the world's leading paleontologists), "Peking Man" also entered evolutionary textbooks as an ancestor of man....

Teilhard de Chardin was also connected with the discovery *and above all the interpretation* of some of the finds of "Java Man," which were fragmentary. In fact, everywhere he went he found "evidence" *which exactly matched his expectations*—namely, that man has "evolved" from ape-like creatures.

If you will examine objectively all the fossil evidence for the "evolution of man," I believe you will find that *there is no conclusive or even remotely reasonable evidence whatever for this "evolution."* The evidence is believed to be proof for human evolution *because men want to believe this; they believe in a philosophy that requires that man evolved from ape-like creatures.* Neanderthal Man is simply "Homo sapiens," no different from modern man than modern men are different from each other, a variation within one definite kind or species.* Please note that the *pictures* of Neanderthal Man in evolutionary textbooks are the invention of artists *who have a preconceived idea of what "primitive man" must have looked like,* based on evolutionary philosophy!

I have said enough, I believe, not to show that I can "disprove" the "evolution of man" (for who can *prove or disprove anything* with such fragmentary evidence?!), but to indicate that we must be very critical indeed of the biased interpretations of such scanty evidence. Let us leave it to our modern pagans and their philosophers to become excited with the discovery of every new skull, bone, or even a single tooth, about which newspaper headlines declare: "New Ancestor of Man Found." This is not even the realm of vain knowledge; it is the realm of *modern fables and fairy tales*, of a wisdom which truly has become astonishingly foolish.

* Many evolutionists have come to the conclusion that *Homo erectus* also belongs within the species *Homo sapiens*. For example, William S. Laughlin (University of Connecticut), in studying the Eskimos and Aleuts, noted the many similarities between these peoples and the Asian *Homo erectus* people (*Sinanthropus*). He concludes his study: "When we find that significant differences have developed, over a short time span, between closely related and contiguous peoples, as in Alaska and Greenland, and when we consider the vast differences that exist between remote groups such as Eskimos and Bushmen, who are known to belong to the single species of *Homo sapiens*, it seems justifiable to conclude that *Sinanthropus* belongs within this same diverse species" (*Science* 142, Nov. 8, 1963, p. 644).—ED.

Where does the Orthodox Christian turn if he wishes to learn the true doctrine of the creation of the world and man? St. Basil tells us clearly:

Whence shall I begin my narration? Shall I refute the vanity of the heathens? Or shall I proclaim our truth? The wise men of the Greeks wrote many works about nature, but not one account among them remained unaltered and firmly established, for the later account always overthrew the preceding one. As a consequence, *there is no need for us to refute their words: they avail mutually for their own undoing.*⁵⁸

Like St. Basil,

*let us leave the accounts of outsiders to those outside, and turn back to the explanation of the Church.*⁵⁹

Let us, like him,

examine the structure of the world and contemplate the whole universe, *beginning, not from the wisdom of the world, but from what God taught His servant when He spoke to him in person and without riddles.*⁶⁰

Now we shall see that the evolutionary view of man's origin not only teaches us nothing in reality of man's origin, but rather teaches a *false doctrine of man*, as you yourself prove when you are forced to express this doctrine *in order to defend the idea of evolution*.

When setting forth your view of man's nature, based on your acceptance of the idea of evolution, you write: "Man is not *naturally* the image of God. Naturally he is an animal, an evolved beast, dust from the ground. He is the image of God supernaturally." And again: "We see that by himself man is nothing, and let us not be scandalized by his natural origin." "God's breath of life transformed the animal to man without changing a single anatomical feature of his body, without changing a single cell. I would not be surprised if Adam's body had been in all aspects the body of an ape." Again: "Man is what he is, not

because of his *nature*, which is dust from the ground, but because of the supernatural grace given to him by the breath of God."

Now, before examining the Patristic teaching of man's nature, I will admit that this word "nature" can be a little ambiguous, and that one can find passages where the Holy Fathers use the expression "human nature" in the way it is used in common discourse, as referring to this fallen human nature whose effects we observe every day. *But there is a higher Patristic teaching of human nature, a specific doctrine of human nature, given by Divine revelation, which cannot be understood or accepted by one who believes in evolution.* The evolutionary doctrine of human nature, based on a "common sense" view of fallen human nature, is the *Roman Catholic*, not the Orthodox, teaching.

The Orthodox doctrine of human nature is set forth most concisely in the "Spiritual Instructions" of Abba Dorotheus. This book is accepted in the Orthodox Church as the "ABC," the basic textbook of Orthodox spirituality; it is the first spiritual reading which an Orthodox monk is given, and it remains his constant companion for the rest of his life, to be read and re-read. It is most significant that *the Orthodox doctrine of human nature is set forth in the very first page of this book, because this doctrine is the foundation of the entire Orthodox spiritual life.*

What is this doctrine? Abba Dorotheus writes in the very first words of his First Instruction:

In the beginning, when God created man (Gen. 2:20), He placed him in Paradise and adorned him with every virtue, giving him the commandment not to taste of the tree which was in the midst of Paradise. And thus he remained there in the enjoyment of Paradise; in prayer, in vision, in every glory and honor, having sound senses and *being in the same natural condition in which he was created.* For God created man according to His own image, that is, immortal, master of himself, and adorned with every virtue. But when he transgressed the commandment, eating the fruit of the tree of which God had commanded him not to taste, then he was banished from Paradise (Gen. 3), *fell away from the natural condition, and fell into a condition against nature*, and then he remained in sin, in love of glory, in love for the enjoyments of this age and of other passions, and he was

mastered by them, for he became himself their slave through the transgression.

(The Lord Jesus Christ) accepted our very nature, the essence of our constitution, and became a new Adam in the image of God Who created the first Adam; *He renewed the natural condition* and made the senses again sound, as they were in the beginning.

The children of humility of wisdom are: self-reproach, not trusting one's own mind, hatred of one's own will; for through them a man is enabled to come to himself and *return to the natural condition* through purifying himself by the holy commandments of Christ.⁶¹

The same doctrine is set forth by other ascetic Fathers. Thus Abba Isaiah teaches:

In the beginning, when God created man, He placed him in Paradise, and he had then sound senses, *which stood in their natural order*; but when he obeyed the one who deceived him, all his senses were *changed into an unnatural state*, and he was then cast out from his glory.⁶²

And the same Father continues:

And so, let him who desires *to come into his natural condition* cut off all his fleshly desires, so as to place himself in the condition *according to the nature of the (spiritual) mind*.⁶³

The Holy Fathers clearly teach that, when Adam sinned, man did not merely lose something which had been *added to his nature*, but rather *human nature itself was changed, corrupted*, at the same time that man lost God's grace. The Divine services of the Orthodox Church also, which are a foundation of our Orthodox dogmatic teaching and spiritual life, clearly teach that the human nature which we now observe *is not natural to us*, but has been corrupted:

Healing *human nature, which had become corrupted by the ancient transgression*, without corruption a child is born anew (Menaion, Dec. 22, Matins, Theotokion of the Sixth Canticle of the Canon).

And again:

The Creator and Lord, desiring to save from corruption *the corrupted human nature*, having come to dwell in a womb cleansed by the Holy Spirit, is unutterably formed (Menaion, Jan. 23, Theotokion of the Sixth Canticle of the Canon of Matins).

It can be noted in such hymns also that our whole Orthodox conception of the Incarnation of Christ and our salvation through Him is bound up with *a proper understanding of human nature as it was in the beginning*, to which Christ has restored us. We believe that we will one day live with Him *in a world very much like the world that existed here on this earth, before the fall of Adam, and that our nature will then be the nature of Adam*—only even higher, because everything material and changeable will then be left behind, as the quote already given from St. Symeon the New Theologian clearly indicates.

And now I must show you further that even your doctrine of human nature *as it is now in this fallen world*, is incorrect, is not according to the teaching of the Holy Fathers. Perhaps it is a result of careless expression on your part—but I believe it is probably *precisely because you have been led into error by believing the theory of evolution*—that you write: "Apart from God man is from his nature nothing at all, because his nature is the dust from the ground, like the nature of the animals."* *Because you believe in the philosophy of evolution*, you are forced either to believe that human nature is only a low, animal nature, as you indeed express by saying that "man is not *naturally* the image of God"; or

* The evolutionary worldview, as we have seen, holds that "there is no such thing as a fixed 'human nature'" (Shere Hite, *The Hite Report on the Family*). Man has the same nature as the animals (the "single filament" posited by Erasmus Darwin), and this nature is constantly evolving. Since man is no more than an animal, he is, like the animals, wholly subject to environmental conditioning. That is why "human nature" in this view is infinitely malleable, and can be changed ("evolved") at will by the rearrangement of social institutions. Such a view is, of course, totalitarian in its nature, as has been seen in all political attempts to enforce it, ever since the French Revolution. As Robert H. Bork remarks, "Since actual humans resist attempts to remake their natures, coercion and, ultimately, violence will be required" (*Slouching towards Gomorrah*, p. 27). (See above, p. 323 n.)—ED.

at best (since I think that you do not really believe this, being Orthodox), you divide human nature artificially into two parts; that which is from "nature" and that which is from God. But the true Orthodox anthropology teaches that *human nature is one*, it is that which we have from God; *we do not have some nature "from the animals" or "from the dust" which is different from the nature with which God created us*. And therefore, *even the fallen, corrupted human nature which we have now is not "nothing at all,"* as you say, but it still preserves in some degree the "goodness" in which God created it. Behold what Abba Dorotheus writes of this doctrine:

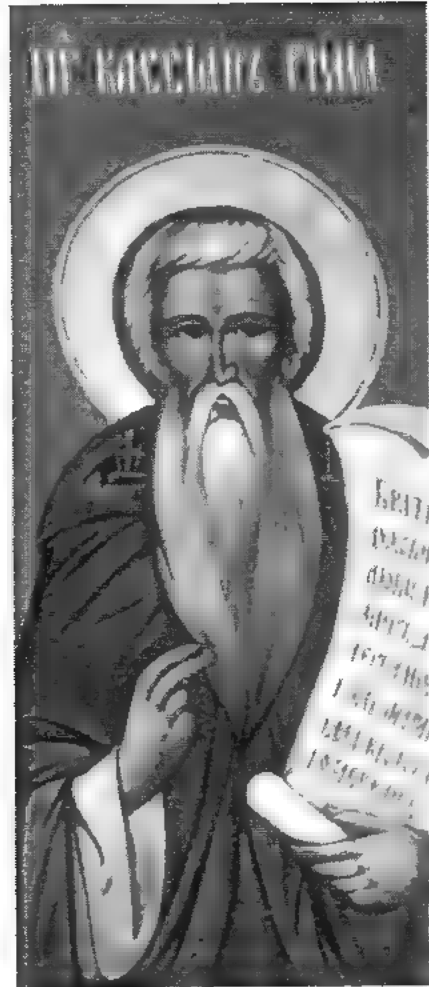
We have naturally the virtues given to us by God. For when God created man, He sowed virtues in him, as also He said: "Let us create man in our image and likeness" (Gen. 1:26). It is said: "In our image," inasmuch as God created the soul immortal and with authority over itself, and "in our likeness," referring to virtues.... *By nature God gave us virtues. But passions do not belong to us by nature*, for they do not even have any substance or composition.... But the soul in its love of pleasure, having inclined away from virtues, instills the passions in itself and strengthens them against itself.⁶⁴

Further, these God-given virtues still exercise themselves even in our fallen state. This is the extremely important Orthodox teaching of St. John Cassian, who thus refuted the error of Blessed Augustine, who indeed believed that man apart from God's grace was "nothing at all." St. Cassian teaches in his Thirteenth Conference:

That the human race after the fall actually did not lose the knowledge of good is affirmed by the Apostle, who says: "When the Gentiles, who have not the law, *do by nature those things that are of the law*, these who have not the law are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law *written in their hearts*" (Rom. 2:14-15).

And again:

To the Pharisees He said that they can know the truth: "Why even of yourselves do ye not judge that which is just?" (Luke 12:57). He



St. John Cassian the Roman (ca. 356–435).
*Icon by Archimandrite Cyprian of Holy Trinity
Monastery, Jordanville, New York.*

would not have said this if they could not have discerned what is just *by their natural reason*. Therefore one should not think that human nature is capable only of evil.⁶⁵

Likewise, with regard to the righteous Job, St. Cassian asks whether “he conquered the various snares of the enemy in this battle apart from his own virtue, but only with the assistance of God’s grace,” and he answers:

*Job conquered him by his own power. However, the grace of God also did not abandon Job; lest the tempter burden him with temptations above his strength, it (God’s grace) allowed him to be tempted as much as the virtue of the tempted one could bear.*⁶⁶

Again, with regard to the Patriarch Abraham:

God's righteousness wished to test the faith of Abraham, *not that which the Lord had instilled in him, but that which he showed by his own freedom.*⁶⁷

Of course, the reason why Augustine (and Roman Catholicism and Protestantism after him) believed that man was nothing without grace, was because *he had an incorrect conception of human nature*, based on a naturalistic view of man. The Orthodox doctrine, on the other hand, *of human nature as it was created in the beginning by God and is even now preserved in part in our fallen state*, prevents us from falling into any such a false dualism between what is "man's" and what is "God's." To be sure, *everything good that man has is from God, not the least his very nature*, for the Scripture says, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Man has no "animal nature" as such and never did have; he has only the fully human nature which God gave him in the beginning, and which he has not entirely lost even now.

Is it necessary to quote for you the multitude of clear Patristic evidence that the "image of God," which is to be found in the soul, *refers to man's nature and is not something added from without*? Let it suffice to quote the marvellous testimony of St. Gregory the Theologian, showing how man *by his constitution* stands between two worlds, and is free to follow whichever side of his nature he will:

I do not understand how I became joined to the body and how, *being the image of God*, I became mixed with dirt.... What wisdom is revealed in me, and what a great mystery! Was it not for this that God led us into this warfare and battle with the body, that we, *being a part of Divinity* [how boldly the Theologian speaks of man's nature, so boldly that we cannot take his words absolutely literally!],* and pro-

* The Orthodox theological writer Vladimir Lossky explains why this statement cannot be taken literally, and quotes from St. Gregory the Theologian's other writings to show that he did not believe the human spirit itself to be an Uncreated part of Divinity. The phrase "part of Divinity" refers to a *participation* in Divine energy (grace) that is proper to man's spirit. See Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 117-18; see also the teaching of St. John Chrysostom on p. 161 above.—ED.

ceeding from above, might not be haughty and exalt ourselves because of our dignity, and might not disdain the Creator, but might always direct our gaze toward Him, and so that our dignity might keep within bounds the infirmity joined to us?—So that we might know that at the same time we are both immensely great and immensely low, earthly and heavenly, temporal and immortal, inheritors of light and inheritors of fire or darkness, depending upon which side we incline towards? *So was our constitution established*, and this, as far as I can see, was in order that the earthly dust might humble us if we should imagine to exalt ourselves because of the image of God.⁶⁸

This image of God which man possesses by his nature was not completely lost even among the pagans, as St. John Cassian teaches; it has not been lost *even today*, when man, under the influence of modern philosophy and evolutionism, is trying to turn himself into a sub-human beast—for even now God awaits man's conversion, awaits his awakening *to the true human nature which he has within him*.

And this brings me to the very important point of your interpretation of the teaching of the God-bearing Father of almost our own times, St. Seraphim of Sarov, contained in his famous "Conversation with Motovilov."

St. Seraphim is my own patron Saint, and it was our Brotherhood of St. Herman that first published the complete text of this "Conversation" in the Russian language in which it was spoken (for the pre-revolutionary edition was incomplete), as well as other of his genuine words which had hitherto been unpublished. So you may be sure that we do not believe that he taught a false doctrine of the nature of man, one that contradicts that of other Holy Fathers. But let us examine what St. Seraphim himself says.

As you correctly quote him, St. Seraphim says:

Many explain that when it says in the Bible that God breathed the breath of life into the face of Adam the first-created, who was created by Him from the dust of the ground, it must mean that until then there was neither human soul nor spirit in Adam, but only the flesh created from the dust of the ground. This interpretation is wrong,



St. Seraphim of Sarov, Russia (1759–1833).

for the Lord created Adam from the dust of the ground with the constitution which our dear little father, the holy Apostle Paul confirms: “May your spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes. 5:23). And all these three parts of our nature were created from the dust of the ground, and Adam was not created dead, but an active being like all the other animate creatures of God living on earth. The point is that if the Lord God had not then breathed into his face the breath of life (that is, the grace of our Lord God the Holy Spirit ...), Adam, however perfect he had been created and superior to all the other creatures of God as the crown of creation on earth, nevertheless would have been without the Holy Spirit within himself, like unto the other creatures, although he possessed flesh, soul and spirit. But when the Lord God breathed into Adam’s face the breath of life,

then, according to Moses' word, "Adam became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7), that is, completely and in every way like God, and, like Him, forever immortal.* ⁶⁹

This is the one Patristic quote you give which *seems* to support your view that *man was first a beast, and then (later in time) received the image of God and became man*. This is indeed what you *must* believe if you accept the theory of evolution, and I am glad to see that you have the courage to express clearly what all "Orthodox evolutionists" actually believe (even if in a rather confused manner) but are often afraid to express openly for fear of offending other Orthodox believers who are "naive" and in their "simplicity" refuse to believe that man in actual fact is "descended from apes" or ape-like creatures.

But here let us remember the words of St. Gregory Palamas which I have already quoted:

*If one of the Fathers says the same thing as do those from without, the concordance is only verbal, the thought being quite different. The former, in fact, have, according to Paul, "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), while the latter express at best a human reasoning.... What man of sound spirit and belonging to the Church could from this conclude that their teaching comes from God?*⁷⁰

And in fact, I must tell you that *you have completely misunderstood* the teaching of St. Seraphim, who is not at all teaching what the doctrine of evolution teaches. This I can show by quoting both the clear teaching of other Holy Fathers and that of St. Seraphim himself.

But first I must explain what might seem to a rationalist to be a "contradiction" between the teaching of St. Seraphim and that of other Fathers. First, we should be clear that when St. Seraphim speaks of man as being composed of "spirit and soul and body" he is *not* contradicting those many other Holy Fathers who speak of human nature as

* Here we have corrected some mistakes in the English translation. (The translation that Dr. Kalomiros used as his source had not been done by Fr. Seraphim.) Ed.

merely "soul and body"; he is merely making a distinction between different aspects of the soul and speaking of them separately, as many Holy Fathers also speak.* Second, in saying that the "breath of life" which God breathed into the face of Adam is the grace of the Holy Spirit, he is not contradicting the very many Holy Fathers who teach that the "breath of life" is the *soul*, but is only giving a perhaps more profound and precise interpretation of this passage from Scripture. But is he actually making the rationalistic distinction which you make between the *nature* of man which existed "before" this breathing, and the *grace* which was communicated by it? Does Orthodox theology accept the rigid dichotomy which Roman Catholic teaching makes between "nature" and "grace," as though men knew everything there is to know about these two great mysteries?

No; Orthodox theology does not know such a rigid dichotomy, and that is why rationalist scholars find so many "contradictions" between different Orthodox Fathers on this subject, as will be clear from a single example: Does immortality belong to the human soul by nature or by grace? Different Orthodox Fathers who are of equal authority answer differently on this question, not because they teach differently about man and thus "contradict" each other, but because they approach the question from different sides. Those who approach the question of man's nature more from the side of the present corrupted human nature say that man's soul is immortal by grace; while those (especially the ascetic and mystical Fathers) who begin with the view of man's nature as it was in the beginning, view the soul rather as immortal by nature. It may even be that one and the same Father views the question now from one and now from the other side, as does St. Gregory of Nyssa when he says in one place: "That which reasons, and is mortal, and is capable of thought and knowledge, is called 'man'";⁷¹ but in another place he says: "Man did not in the course of his first production have united to the very essence of his nature the liability to passion and to death."⁷² Does this great Father "contradict" himself? Of course he does not.

* The spirit (in Greek, *nous*) is the highest part of the human soul. In the words of St. Diodochus of Photiki, it dwells "in the depths of the soul" (*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 280).—ED.

What belongs to first-created Adam by nature and what by grace? Let us not make false rationalistic distinctions, but let us admit that *we do not fully understand this mystery*. Nature and grace *both come from God*. The nature of first-created Adam was so exalted that we can only faintly understand it now by our own experience of grace, which has been given to us by the Second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ; but Adam's state was also higher than anything we can imagine even from our own experience of grace, for even his high nature was made yet more perfect by grace, and he was, as St. Seraphim says, "completely and in every way like God, and, like Him, forever immortal."

What is absolutely clear, and what is sufficient for us to know, is that the creation of man—of his spirit and soul and body, *in the Divine grace which perfected his nature—is a single act of creation*, and it cannot be artificially divided up, as though one part of it came "first," and another part "later." God created man *in grace*, but neither the Holy Scriptures nor the Holy Fathers teach us that this grace came *later in time* than the creation of man's nature. This teaching belongs to Medieval Latin scholasticism, as I will show below.

St. Seraphim only *appears* to teach this doctrine, because he speaks in terms of the simple narrative of the sacred text of Genesis. But it is clear enough, as St. Gregory Palamas says, that "*the concordance is only verbal, the thought being quite different.*" To be convinced of this we have only to examine *how the Holy Fathers instruct us to interpret the sacred narrative of Genesis at this point*.

Fortunately for us, *this very question was raised and answered by the Holy Fathers*. This answer is summed up for us by St. John Damascene:

From the earth (God) formed his body and by His own inbreathing gave him a rational and understanding soul, which last we say is the divine image.... *The body and the soul were formed at the same time—not one before and the other afterwards*, as the ravings of Origen would have it. ³

Here let us be sure again that we understand that although St. John speaks of the inbreathing of God as the *soul*, he does not teach a doc-

trine different from St. Seraphim, who speaks of this inbreathing as the *grace of the Holy Spirit*.^{*} St. John in fact hardly speaks of grace at all in the creation of man, for *it is understood as being present in the whole process of creation*, above all in the creation of the image of God, the soul, which he teaches is part of our nature. St. Gregory of Nyssa likewise speaks of the creation of man without paying special attention to what comes from "nature" and what from "grace," only ending his whole treatise with the words:

May we all return to that *Divine grace in which God at the first created man*, when He said, "Let us make man in our image and likeness."⁷⁴

St. John Damascene and others who speak of the inbreathing of God as the soul view this matter from an aspect slightly different from that of St. Seraphim; but clearly *the teaching of all these Fathers regarding the whole creation of man*, and in particular regarding the question of *whether the narrative of Genesis indicates a difference in time between the "forming" and "inbreathing" of man—is the same*. St. John Damascene speaks for all the Holy Fathers when he says that they occurred "*at the same time—not one before and the other afterwards*."

In saying this, St. John Damascene was refuting in particular the Origenist heresy of the "pre-existence of souls." But *there was also a heresy opposed to this, which taught the "pre-existence" of the human body, just as it is taught by modern "Christian evolutionists"*. This heresy was specifically refuted by St. Gregory of Nyssa, whom I shall now quote.

After discussing the Origenist error of the "pre-existence of souls," St. Gregory continues:

Others, on the contrary, marking the order of the creation of man as stated by Moses, say that *the soul is second to the body in order of time*,

^{*} Vladimir Lossky both affirms and clarifies this point: "The 'Divine breath' points to a mode of creation, by virtue of which the human spirit is intimately connected with grace, and is produced by it in the same way as a movement of air is produced by the breath and is inseparable from it" (*The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 118).—ED.

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since God first took dust from the earth and formed man, and then animated the being thus formed by His breath: and by this argument they prove that the flesh is more noble than the soul, that which was previously formed than that which was afterwards infused into it: for they say that the soul was made for the body, that the thing formed might not be without breath and motion, and that everything that is made for something else is surely less precious than that for which it is made.... *The doctrine of both is equally to be rejected.* ⁵

Specifically refuting the doctrine of the “pre-existence of the body,” St. Gregory says:

Nor again are we in our doctrine to begin by making up man like a clay figure, and to say that the soul came into being for the sake of this; for surely in that case the intellectual nature would be shown to be less precious than the clay figure. *But as man is one, the being consisting of soul and body, we are to suppose that the beginning of his existence is one, common to both parts, so that he should not be found to be antecedent and posterior to himself, if the bodily element were first in point of time, and the other were a later addition....* For as our nature is conceived as twofold, according to the apostolic teaching, made up of the visible man and the hidden man, if the one came first and the other supervened, *the power of Him that made us will be shown to be in some way imperfect, as not being completely sufficient for the whole task at once, but dividing the work, and busying itself with each of the halves in turn.*⁶

Do I need to point out that the “God” of “Christian evolution” is *precisely this kind of God who is not “completely sufficient for the whole task at once”; and the very reason why the doctrine of evolution was invented* was to account for the universe on the assumption that *God either does not exist or is incapable of creating in six days or bringing the world into existence by His mere word?* EVOLUTION WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN THOUGHT OF BY MEN WHO BELIEVE IN THE GOD WHOM ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS WORSHIP.

The account of the creation of man in the book of Genesis must be

understood in a "God-befitting manner." Here you have made the mistake of accepting a literal interpretation of the text *precisely where the Holy Fathers do not allow this!* How important it is for us to read the Holy Scriptures *as the Holy Fathers instruct us, and not according to our own understanding!*

It is quite clear that St. Seraphim did not understand the text of Genesis in the way in which you have interpreted it. Indeed, there are other passages in the same "Conversation with Motovilov" which reveal that St. Seraphim viewed the creation and nature of Adam *in precisely the same way as the whole Patristic tradition.*

Thus, immediately after the passage which you quote, and which I have reproduced above, there follow these words which you did *not* quote (the English translation here is not precise, and so I am translating directly from the Russian original):

Adam was created to such an extent immune to the action of every one of the elements created by God, that neither could water drown him, nor fire burn him, nor could the earth swallow him up in its abysses, nor could the air harm him by its action in any way whatsoever. Everything was subject to him....

This is precisely a description of the incorruption of Adam's body in a creation subject to laws quite different from today's "laws of nature"—*in which as an "evolutionist" you cannot believe, since you must believe with modern philosophy that the material creation was "natural," that is, corrupted, even before the fall of Adam!*

Again, shortly after this passage, St. Seraphim says:

To Eve also the Lord God gave the same wisdom, strength, and unlimited power, and all the other good and holy qualities. And *He created her not from the dust of the ground but from Adam's rib* in the Eden of delight, in the Paradise which He had planted in the midst of the earth.¹¹

Do you believe in this creation of Eve from Adam's rib as an historical fact *as all the Holy Fathers do?* No, you cannot, because from the point

of view of evolutionary philosophy it is quite absurd: why should "God" evolve Adam's body from beasts "naturally," and then create Eve miraculously? *The "God" of evolution does not perform such miracles!*

Let us look now specifically at the Orthodox Patristic view of the *body* of first-created Adam, which according to the evolutionary doctrine had to be corruptible like the corruptible world from which it "evolved," and might even have been, as you state, entirely that of an ape.

The Holy Scripture explicitly teaches: "*God created man incorruptible*" (Wisdom 2:23).

St. Gregory the Sinaite teaches:

*The body, theologians say, was created incorruptible, which is how it will arise, just as the soul was created passionless; but just as the soul had the freedom to sin, so the body had the possibility to become subject to corruption.*⁷⁸

And again:

The incorruptible body will be earthly, but without moisture and coarseness, having been unutterably changed from animate to spiritual, so that it will be both of the dust and heavenly. *Just as it was created in the beginning, so also will it arise, that it may be conformable to the image of the Son of Man by entire participation in deification.*⁷⁹

Notice here that the body in the future age will still be "of the dust." When looking at the corruptible dust of this fallen world, we are humbled to think of this side of our nature; but when we think of that *incorruptible dust of the first-created world out of which God made Adam*, how exalted we are by the grandeur of even this, the lowest part of God's unutterable creation!

St. Gregory the Theologian suggests, giving a symbolical interpretation of the "garments of skins" with which God clothed Adam and Eve after their transgression, that *the flesh of our present human body is different from the flesh of first-created Adam:*

Adam “is clothed in garments of skin” (perhaps a coarser, mortal, and antagonistic flesh).⁸⁰

Again, St. Gregory the Sinaite says:

Man was created incorruptible, as also he will arise; but not unchangeable, nor yet changeable, but having the power at his own desire to change or not.... Corruption is the offspring of flesh. To eat food and excrete the excess, to hold the head proudly, and to lie down to sleep – are the natural attributes of beasts and cattle, *into which we also, having become like to the cattle through the transgression, fell away from the God-given good things natural to us*, and became from rational, cattle-like, and from divine, bestial.⁸¹

Concerning Adam’s state in Paradise, St. John Chrysostom teaches:

Man lived on earth like an angel; he was in the body, but he had no bodily needs; like a king, adorned with purple and a diadem and clothed in royal garb, he took delight in the dwelling of Paradise, having an abundance in everything.... Before the fall men lived in Paradise like angels; they were not inflamed with lust, were not kindled by other passions either, were not burdened with bodily needs; but *being created entirely incorruptible and immortal*, they did not even need the covering of clothing.⁸²

St. Symeon the New Theologian likewise speaks clearly of first-created Adam in Paradise, and his final state in the future age:

If now, after we transgressed the commandment and were condemned to die, people have multiplied so much, just imagine how many of them there would have been if all who have been born from the creation of the world had not died? And what a life they would have lived, *being immortal and incorrupt*, strangers to sin, sorrows, and cares and serious needs?! And how, having advanced in the keeping of the commandments and in the good ordering of the dispositions of the heart, in time they would have ascended to the most

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perfect glory and, having been changed, would have drawn near to God, and the soul of each would have become as it were light -shining by reason of the illuminations which would have been poured out upon it from the Godhead! And this sensual and crudely material body would have become as it were immaterial and spiritual, above every organ of sense; and the joy and rejoicing with which we would then have been filled from contact one with another in truth would have been unutterable and beyond the thought of man.... Their life in Paradise was not weighed down by labors and was not made difficult by misfortunes. *Adam was created with a body incorruptible, even though material and not yet spiritual....* Concerning our body the Apostle says: "It is sowed a natural body, it will arise" not such as the body of the first-created one was before the transgression of the commandment -that is, material, sensual, changeable, having need of sensual food—but "it will arise a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44), and unchangeable, such as was the body, after His Resurrection, of our Lord Jesus Christ, the second Adam, the first-born among the dead, which is incomparably more excellent than the body of the first-created Adam.⁸³

From our experience of our own corruptible body it is not possible for us to understand the state of the incorruptible body of Adam, which had no natural needs as we know them, which ate of "every tree" of Paradise without excreting any excess, and which did not know sleep (until God's direct action caused him to sleep, so that Eve might be created from his rib). And how much less are we able to understand the even more exalted state of our bodies in the future age! But we know enough from the Church's teaching to refute those who think they can understand these mysteries by scientific knowledge and philosophy. *The state of Adam and the first-created world has been placed forever beyond the knowledge of science by the barrier of Adam's transgression, which changed the very nature of Adam and the creation, and indeed the nature of knowledge itself.* Modern science knows only what it observes and what may be *reasonably* inferred from observation; its guesses about the earliest creation have no more and no less validity than the myths and fables of the ancient pagans. *The true knowledge of*

Adam and the first-created world—as much as is useful for us to know—is accessible only in God's revelation and in the Divine vision of the Saints.

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All that I have said in this letter, derived strictly from the Holy Fathers, will come as a surprise to many Orthodox Christians. Those who have read some of the Holy Fathers will perhaps wonder why they “haven’t heard it before.” The answer is simple: if they have read many of the Holy Fathers, they *have* encountered the Orthodox doctrine of Adam and the creation; *but they have been interpreting the Patristic texts hitherto through the eyes of modern science and philosophy, and therefore they have been blinded to the true Patristic teaching.* It is also true that the doctrine of the *body* of Adam and the *material* nature of the first-created world is taught most clearly and explicitly in the later Fathers of exalted spiritual life such as St. Symeon the New Theologian and St. Gregory the Sinaite, and the writings of these Fathers are not widely read even today in Greek or Russian, and hardly any of them exist at all in other languages. (In fact, several of the passages I have quoted from St. Gregory the Sinaite have been mistranslated in the English *Philokalia*.)

I was very interested to read in your letter that you set forth the correct Patristic teaching that “The creation of God, even the angelic nature, has always been, in comparison with God, something material. Angels are incorporeal in comparison with us, biological men. But in comparison with God they are also material and bodily creatures.” This teaching, which is set forth most clearly in the ascetic Fathers such as St. Macarius the Great and St. Gregory the Sinaite, helps us to understand the “spiritual body” with which we shall be clothed in the future age, which is in some way of the dust, earthly, but has no moisture or coarseness, as St. Gregory the Sinaite teaches; and it also helps us to understand that *third* state of our body, that which first-created Adam had before his transgression. Likewise, this doctrine is essential in our understanding of the activity of spiritual beings, angels and demons, even in the present corruptible world. The great Russian Orthodox Father of the nineteenth century, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, devotes an entire volume of his collected works (volume 3) to this subject, and to comparing the authentic Orthodox Patristic doctrine with

the modern Roman Catholic doctrine, as set forth in nineteenth century Latin sources. His conclusion is that the Orthodox doctrine on these matters—on angels and demons, heaven and hell, Paradise—even though it is given to us by sacred tradition only in part, nonetheless is quite precise in that part which we can know; but the Roman Catholic teaching is extremely indefinite and imprecise. The reason for this indefiniteness is not far to seek: from the time Papalism began to abandon the Patristic teaching, it gradually gave itself over to the influence of worldly knowledge and philosophy, first that of such philosophers as Barlaam, and then of modern science. Even by the nineteenth century Roman Catholicism no longer had a certain teaching of its own on these subjects, but had grown accustomed to accept whatever “science” and its philosophy say.

Alas, our present-day Orthodox Christians, and not least those who have been educated in “theological academies,” *have followed the Roman Catholics in this and have come to a similar state of ignorance of the Patristic teaching*. This is why even Orthodox priests are extremely vague about the Orthodox teaching of Adam and the first-created world and blindly accept whatever science says about these things....

The vague teaching on Paradise and creation of Roman Catholicism—and of those Orthodox Christians who are under Western influence in this matter—has deep roots in the past of Western Europe. The Roman Catholic scholastic tradition, even at the height of its Medieval glory, already taught a false doctrine of man, and one which doubtless paved the way for the later acceptance of evolutionism, first in the apostate West, and then in the minds of Orthodox Christians who are insufficiently aware of their Patristic tradition and so have fallen under foreign influences. In fact the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, unlike the Orthodox Patristic teaching, in its doctrine of man *is quite compatible with the idea of evolution which you advocate*.

Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologica*, teaches that:

In the state of innocence, *the human body was in itself corruptible*, but it could be preserved from corruption by the soul.

Again:

It belongs to man to beget offspring, *because of his naturally corruptible body*.⁸⁴

Again:

In Paradise man would have been like an angel in his spirituality of mind, *yet with an animal life in his body*.⁸⁵ Man's body was indissoluble, not by reason of any intrinsic vigor of immortality, *but by reason of a supernatural force given by God to the soul*, whereby it was enabled to preserve the body from all corruption so long as it itself remained subject to God.... This power of preserving the body from corruption *was not natural to the soul*, but the gift of grace.⁸⁶ Now it is clear that such a subjection of the body to the soul and of the lower powers to reason (as Adam had in Paradise) *was not from nature*, or otherwise it would have remained after sin.⁸⁷

This last quote shows clearly that Thomas Aquinas does not know that *man's nature was changed* after the transgression. Again:

The immortality of the first state was based on *a supernatural force in the soul*, and not on any intrinsic disposition of the body.⁸⁸

So far is Thomas Aquinas from the true Orthodox vision of the first-created world that he understands it, as do modern "Christian evolutionists," solely from the viewpoint of this fallen world; and thus he is forced to believe, against the testimony of Orthodox Holy Fathers, that Adam naturally *slept* in Paradise,⁸⁹ and that he voided faecal matter, a sign of corruption:

Some say that in the state of innocence man would not have taken more than necessary food, so that there would have been nothing superfluous. This, however, is unreasonable to suppose, as implying that there would have been no faecal matter. Therefore there was need for voiding the surplus, yet so disposed by God as not to be unbefitting.⁹⁰

How low is the view of those who try to understand God's creation and Paradise when their starting point is their everyday observation of this

present fallen world! As against St. Seraphim's splendid vision of man's *invulnerability to the elements* in Paradise, behold Thomas Aquinas' purely mechanistic explanation of the rationalistic questions: what happened when a hard body came into contact with the soft body of Adam?

In the state of innocence, man's body could be preserved from suffering injury from a hard body, partly by the use of his reason, whereby he could avoid what was harmful; and partly also by Divine providence, which so preserved him, that nothing of a harmful nature could come upon him unawares.⁹¹

Finally, Thomas Aquinas himself does not teach, but other Medieval scholastics (William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure) did teach, the very foundation of present-day "Christian evolutionary" views of man's creation:

*Man was not created in grace, but grace was bestowed on him subsequently, before sin.*⁹²

In a word: according to Orthodox doctrine, which comes from Divine vision, Adam's *nature* in Paradise was different from present human nature, both in body and soul, and this exalted nature was perfected by God's grace; but according to Latin doctrine, which is based on rationalistic deductions from the present fallen creation, man is *naturally corruptible and mortal*, just as he is now, and his state in Paradise was a special, supernatural gift.

I have quoted all these passages from a heterodox authority, not in order to argue over details of Adam's life in Paradise, but merely to show how far one corrupts the marvelous Patristic vision of Adam and the first-created world when one approaches it with the wisdom of this fallen world. *Neither science nor logic can tell us a thing about Paradise*; and yet many Orthodox Christians are so cowed by modern science and its rationalistic philosophy that they are actually afraid to read seriously the first chapters of Genesis, knowing that modern "wise men" find so many things there that are "dubious" or "confused" or need to be "reinterpreted," or that one may obtain the reputation of being a



St. Nectarios (Kephalas) of Pentapolis, Arhens and Aegina
(1846–1920).

“fundamentalist” if one dares to read the text simply, “as it is written,” *as all the Holy Fathers read it.*

The instinct of the simple Orthodox Christian is sound when he recoils from the “sophisticated,” fashionable view that man is descended from an ape or any other lower creature, or even (as you say) that Adam might have had the very body of an ape. St. Nectarios of Pentapolis rightly expressed his righteous anger against those who try to “prove that man is an ape, from which they boast that they are descended.” That is the*

* The Greek theologian and philosopher St. Nectarios (1846–1920) wrote: “Those who deny the immortality of the soul undermine both the moral law and the foundations of societies, which they want to see collapsing into ruins, in order that they might prove that man is an ape, from which they boast that they are descended” (*Study concerning the Immortality of the Soul*, Athens, 1901; quoted in Constantine Cavarnos, *Modern Greek Philosophers on the Human Soul*, p. 85).

St. Nectarios read Lamarck’s evolutionary treatise *Philosophie zoologique* and Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*. Discussing these works in his book *Sketch concerning Man* (Athens, 1893), St. Nectarios wrote: “The two volumes of the work *Philosophie zoologique* are in their entirety intended to uphold the degrading evolutionary theory regarding man. The first volume seeks to prove that the human organism evolved from that of an ape, as a result of chance circumstances. And the second volume seeks to prove that the distinctive excellences of the human mind are nothing but an extension of a power which the animals have, differing only in degree. Having weak and badly set foundations ... Lamarck claims to prove that in earlier times nature produced through marvelous evolution one species from another, earlier one. He seeks to establish a gradual chain having successive (not contemporaneous) links and thus to produce finally the human species through a metamorphosis that is the reverse of the truth, and not less marvelous than the transformations one reads about in myth!...

“The Darwinian theories imagined that they arrived at the solution of the anthropological question by accepting the mode of evolution. These theories, not being based on sound foundations, instead of solving the problem rendered it more enigmatic, because they denied the validity of revealed truth, viewed man as belonging to the same order as the irrational animals, denied his spiritual origin and attributed to him a very lowly origin. Their failure had as its chief reason the negation of his lofty origin and of his spiritual nature, which is altogether alien to matter and to the physical world. In general, without the acceptance of revealed truth, man will remain an insoluble problem. The acceptance of it is the firm and safe foundation upon which every inquirer about man must base himself. It is from this that he must begin in order to rightly solve the various parts of the question and learn the truth by means of true science” (quoted in Constantine Cavarnos, *Biological Evolutionism*, pp. 63–65).—ED.

view of Orthodox holiness, which knows that creation is not as modern wise men describe it by their vain philosophy, but as God revealed it to Moses "not in riddles," and as the Holy Fathers have seen it in vision. Man's nature is different from ape nature and has never been mixed with it. If God, for the sake of our humility, had wished to make such a mixture, the Holy Fathers, who saw the very "composition of visible things" in Divine vision, would have known it.

HOW LONG WILL ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS REMAIN IN CAPTIVITY TO THIS VAIN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY? Much is said about the "Western captivity" of Orthodox theology in recent centuries; when will we realize that it is a far more drastic "Western captivity" in which every Orthodox Christian finds himself today, a helpless prisoner of the "spirit of the times," of the dominating current of worldly philosophy which is absorbed in the very air we breathe in an apostate, God-hating society? An Orthodox Christian who is not consciously fighting against the vain philosophy of this age *simply accepts it into himself*, and is at peace with it because his own understanding of Orthodoxy is distorted, does not conform to the Patristic standard.

The sophisticated, worldly-wise laugh at those who call evolution a "heresy." True, evolution is not *strictly speaking* a heresy; neither is Hinduism, *strictly speaking*, a heresy: but like Hinduism (with which it is indeed related, and which probably had an influence on its development) evolutionism is an ideology that is profoundly foreign to the teaching of Orthodox Christianity, and it involves one in so many wrong doctrines and attitudes that it would be far better if it were simply a heresy and could thus be easily identified and combatted. Evolutionism is closely bound up with the whole apostate mentality of the rotten "Christianity" of the West; it is a vehicle of the whole "new spirituality" and "new Christianity" in which the devil is now striving to submerge the last true Christians. It offers an *alternative explanation* of creation to that of the Holy Fathers; it allows an Orthodox Christian under its influence *to read the Holy Scriptures and not understand them*, automatically "adjusting" the text to fit his preconceived philosophy of nature. Its acceptance cannot but involve the acceptance also of *alternative explanations* of other parts of Divine revelation, of an

automatic "adjustment" of other Scriptural and Patristic texts to fit in with modern "wisdom."

I believe that in your feeling for God's creation, as you describe it in your letter, you are Orthodox; but why do you feel that you must corrupt this feeling with modern wisdom and justify this new ideology which is so foreign to Orthodoxy? You have written most movingly "against false union"; how we wish that you would now become just as great a zealot "against false wisdom," and tell the Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians who have accepted this new doctrine much too uncritically that our only wisdom comes from the Holy Fathers, and all that contradicts it is a lie, even if it calls itself "science."

I beg your forgiveness if anything that I have said seems harsh; I have tried only to speak the truth as I see it in the Holy Fathers. If I have made any mistakes in my citations from the Holy Fathers, I beg you to correct them, but not to let any small mistakes keep you from seeing what I have tried to say. There is much else that I could say on this subject, but I will wait for your reply before doing so. Above all, I have the heartfelt wish that both you and we might see *the true Patristic teaching* on this subject, which is so important for our whole Orthodox worldview. I ask your prayers for myself and our Brotherhood.

With love in Christ our Saviour,
Seraphim, monk



*21. Father Seraphim on the day of his
ordination to the priesthood, April 24, 1977.*